This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

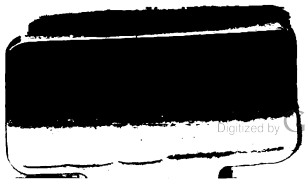
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

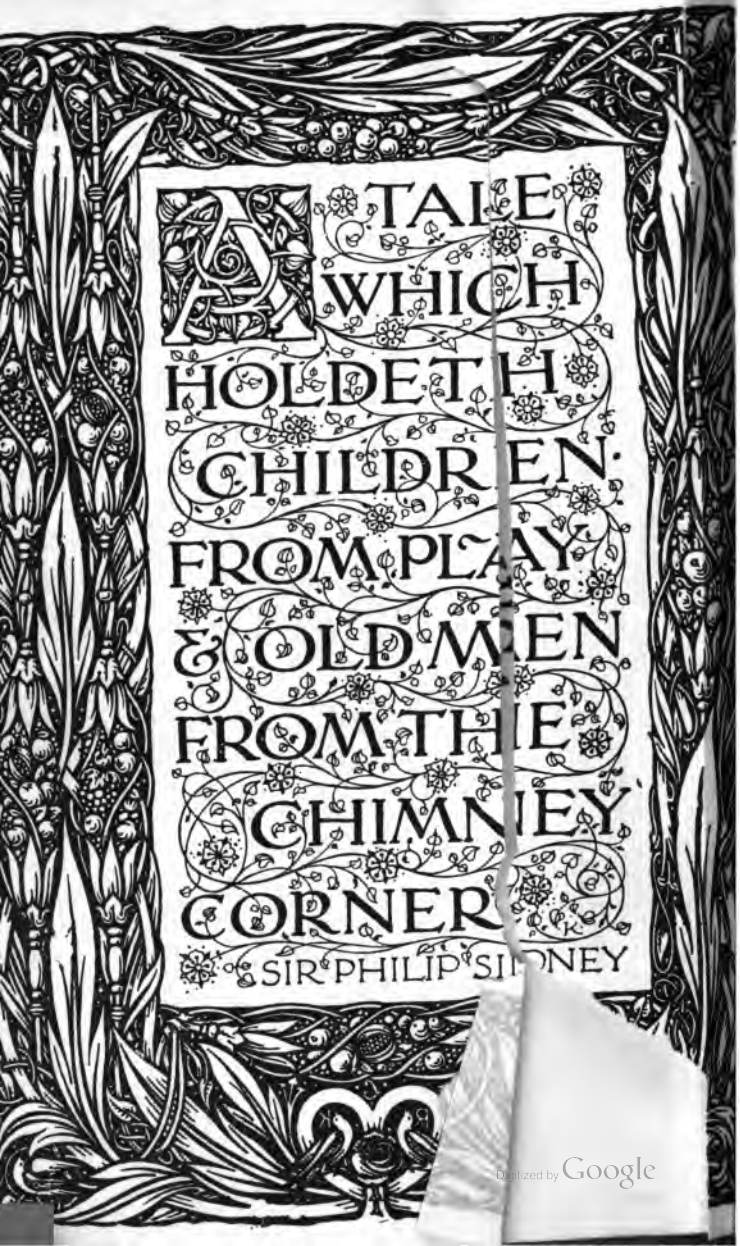


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

The VICOMTE de BRAGELONNE by ALEXANDRE DUMAS

VOLUME III.

LONDON & TORONTO
J·M·DENT & SONS
LTD. NEW YORK
E·P·DUTTON & CO

848
D88vi
tR
1921

FIRST ISSUE OF THIS EDITION . . 1912
REPRINTED 1921

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

Digitized by Google

Replacement
Wahr
4-15-24
10169.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
CLXXVIII.	De Saint-Aignan follows Malicorne's Advice	1
CLXXIX.	Two Old Friends	5
CLXXX.	Wherein may be seen that a Bargain which cannot be made with one Person can be carried out with another	16
CLXXXI.	The Skin of the Bear	24
CLXXXII.	An Interview with the Queen-Mother	29
CLXXXIII.	Two Friends	37
CLXXXIV.	How Jean de la Fontaine wrote his First Tale	42
CLXXXV.	La Fontaine as a Negotiator	46
CLXXXVI.	Madame de Bellière's Plate and Diamonds	51
CLXXXVII.	M. de Mazarin's Receipt	55
CLXXXVIII.	M. Colbert's Rough Draught	61
CLXXXIX.	In which the Author thinks it is now Time to return to the Vicomte de Bragelonne	69
CXC.	Bragelonne continues his Inquiries	73
CXCI.	Two Jealousies	78
CXCII.	A Domiciliary Visit	82
CXCIII.	Porthos's Plan of Action	88
CXCIV.	The Change of Residence, the Trap-Door, and the Portrait	94
CXCV.	Rival Politics	104
CXCVI.	Rival Lovers	108
CXCVII.	King and Nobility	114
CXCVIII.	After the Storm	120
CXCIX.	Heu! Miser!	125
CC.	Wounds upon Wounds	128
CCI.	What Raoul had guessed	133
CCII.	Three Guests astonished to find themselves at Supper together	137
CCIII.	What took Place at the Louvre during the Supper at the Bastille	142
CCIV.	Political Rivals	148
CCV.	In which Porthos is convinced, without having understood anything	154
CCVI.	M. de Baisemeaux's "Society"	159
CCVII.	The Prisoner	165
CCVIII.	How Mouston had become Fatter without giving Porthos Notice thereof, and of the Troubles which consequently befell that Worthy Gentleman	186
CCIX.	Who Messire Jean Percerin was	193
CCX.	The Samples	198
CCXI.	Where, probably, Molière formed his first Idea of the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme"	206
CCXII.	The Beehive, the Bees, and the Honey	210
CCXIII.	Another Supper at the Bastille	218
CCXIV.	The General of the Order	223
CCXV.	The Tempter	230
CCXVI.	Crown and Tiara	237

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
CCXVII.	The Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte	243
CCXVIII.	The Wine of Melun	248
CCXIX.	Nectar and Ambrosia	252
CCXX.	A Gascon, and a Gascon and a half	256
CCXXI.	Colbert	266
CCXXII.	Jealousy	271
CCXXIII.	High Treason	276
CCXXIV.	A Night in the Bastille	284
CCXXV.	The Shadow of Fouquet	289
CCXXVI.	The Morning	303
CCXXVII.	The King's Friend	309
CCXXVIII.	How the Countersign was respected at the Bastille	322
CCXXIX.	The King's Gratitude	328
CCXXX.	The False King	335
CCXXXI.	In which Porthos thinks he is pursuing a Duchy	343
CCXXXII.	The Last Adieux	347
CCXXXIII.	M. de Beaufort	352
CCXXXIV.	Preparations for Departure	358
CCXXXV.	Planchet's Inventory	365
CCXXXVI.	The Inventory of M. de Beaufort	369
CCXXXVII.	The Silver Plate	374
CCXXXVIII.	Captive and Jailers	381
CCXXXIX.	Promises	389
CCXL.	Among Women	398
CCXLI.	The Last Supper	405
CCXLII.	In the Carriage of M. Colbert	411
CCXLIII.	The Two Lighters	417
CCXLIV.	Friendly Advice	423
CCXLV.	How the King, Louis XIV., played his Little Part	428
CCXLVI.	The White Horse and the Black Horse	434
CCXLVII.	In which the Squirrel Falls, in which the Adder Flies	441
CCXLVIII.	Belle-Isle-en-Mer	448
CCXLIX.	The Explanations of Aramis	456
CCL.	Result of the Ideas of the King and the Ideas of D'Artagnan	465
CCLI.	The Ancestors of Porthos	467
CCLII.	The Son of Biscarrat	470
CCLIII.	The Grotto of Locmaria	475
CCLIV.	The Grotto	480
CCLV.	An Homeric Song	487
CCLVI.	The Death of a Titan	491
CCLVII.	The Epitaph of Porthos	496
CCLVIII.	The Round of M. de Gesvres	502
CCLIX.	King Louis XIV.	507
CCLX.	The Friends of M. Fouquet	513
CCLXI.	Porthos's Will	519
CCLXII.	The Old Age of Athos	524
CCLXIII.	The Vision of Athos	528
CCLXIV.	The Angel of Death	533
CCLXV.	The Bulletin	537
CCLXVI.	The Last Canto of the Poem	542
	EPILOGUE	548
	THE DEATH OF D'ARTAGNAN	563

Digitized by Google

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

CHAPTER CLXXVIII

DE SAINT-AIGNAN FOLLOWS MALICORNE'S ADVICE

THE king followed the progress of La Vallière's portrait with a care and attention arising as much from a desire that it should resemble her as from the wish that the painting of it might be long continued. It was amusing to observe him following the artist's brush, awaiting the completion of a particular plan or the result of a combination of colours, and suggesting various modifications to the painter, which the latter consented to adopt with the most respectful docility. And again when the artist, following Malicorne's advice, was a little late in arriving, and when De Saint-Aignan had been obliged to be absent for a short time, it was interesting to observe, though no one witnessed them, those moments of silence full of deep expression, which united in one sigh two souls most disposed to understand each other, and most desirous of this calm and meditation. Then the minutes flew by as if on wings; and as the king drew closer to Louise and bent his burning gaze upon her, a noise was suddenly heard in the anteroom. It was the artist, who had just arrived; De Saint-Aignan, too, had returned full of apologies; and the king began to talk, and La Vallière to answer him very hurriedly, their eyes revealing to De Saint-Aignan that they had enjoyed a century of happiness during his absence. In a word, Malicorne, a philosopher without knowing it, had learned how to inspire the king with an appetite in the midst of plenty, and with desire in the assurance of possession.

La Vallière's fears of interruption had never been realised, and no one imagined that she was absent from her apartment two or three hours every day. She pretended that her health was very uncertain. Those who went to her room always knocked before entering; and Malicorne, the man of so many ingenious inventions, had constructed an acoustic piece of

Digitized by Google

mechanism, by means of which La Vallière when in De Saint-Aignan's apartment was always forewarned of any visits which were paid to the room she usually inhabited. In this manner, therefore, without going outside, and having no confidante, she was able to return to her apartment, thus removing by her appearance, a little tardy perhaps, but no less effectual, the suspicions of the most determined sceptics. Malicorne having asked De Saint-Aignan the next morning what news he had to report, the latter had been obliged to confess that the quarter of an hour's liberty had put the king in most excellent humour. "We must double the dose," replied Malicorne, "but imperceptibly so; wait until they seem to wish it." They were so desirous for it, however, that on the evening of the fourth day, at the moment when the painter was packing up his painting implements during De Saint-Aignan's continued absence, De Saint-Aignan entered, and noticed upon La Vallière's face a shade of disappointment and vexation which she could not conceal. The king was less reserved, and exhibited his annoyance by a very significant shrug of the shoulders, at which La Vallière could not help blushing. "Very good!" thought De Saint-Aignan to himself; "M. Malicorne will be delighted this evening,"—as he in fact was, when it was reported to him.

"It is very evident," Malicorne remarked to the count, "that Mademoiselle de la Vallière hoped that you would be at least ten minutes later."—"And the king that I should be half an hour later, dear M. Malicorne."—"You will be but very indifferently devoted to the king," replied the latter, "if you were to refuse his Majesty that half-hour's satisfaction."

"But the painter?" objected De Saint-Aignan.—"I will take care of him," said Malicorne; "only I must study faces and circumstances a little before I act. Those are my magical operations; and while sorcerers are enabled by means of the astrolabe to take the altitude of the sun, moon, and stars, I am satisfied merely by looking into people's faces, in order to see if their eyes are encircled with dark lines, and if the mouth describes a convex or a concave arc."—"But be careful!"—"Have no fear."

And the cunning Malicorne had every opportunity of watching narrowly and closely; for the very same evening the king accompanied the queens to Madame's apartments, and made himself so remarked by his serious face and his deep sighs, and looked at La Vallière with such a languishing expression, that Malicorne said to Montalais during the evening, "To-morrow;"

Digitized by Google

and he went off to the painter's house in the Rue des Jardins-St.-Paul to beg him to postpone the next sitting for a couple of days.

De Saint-Aignan was not within when La Vallière, who was now quite familiar with the lower story, lifted up the trap-door and descended. The king, as usual, was waiting for her on the staircase, and held a bouquet in his hand; as soon as he saw her, he clasped her tenderly in his arms. La Vallière, much moved at the action, looked around the room; but when she saw that the king was alone, she did not complain of it. They sat down. The king, reclining near the cushions on which Louise was seated, with his head supported by her knees, placed there as in an asylum whence no one could banish him, gazed ardently upon her; and as if the moment had arrived when nothing could interpose between their two hearts, she too gazed with similar passion upon him, and from her eyes, so soft and pure, there emanated a flame whose rays went straight to her royal lover's heart, to warm it and then to set it on fire. Transported by contact with the trembling knees, quivering with emotion when the hand of Louise rested on his head, the king restrained his indulgence in that happiness, looking every moment for the return of the painter or of De Saint-Aignan. In that painful expectation he at times strove to escape the subtle allurement which penetrated his veins; he sought to induce a lethargy of heart and sense; he repulsed the reality ripe before him, to pursue its shadow. But the door remained closed; and neither De Saint-Aignan nor the painter appeared, nor did the hangings even move. A mysterious and voluptuous silence reigned in the room,—a silence which seemed to influence even the birds in their gilded prison. The king, completely overcome, turned his head and buried his burning lips in La Vallière's hands, who lost control over herself and passed her hands convulsively against her lover's lips. Louis threw himself upon his knees; and as La Vallière did not move her head, the king's forehead being within reach of her lips, in her ecstasy she touched with a light and furtive kiss the perfumed locks which caressed her cheeks. The king seized her in his arms, and without resistance on her part they exchanged their first kiss,—that burning kiss which changes love into a delirium.

Neither the painter nor De Saint-Aignan returned that day. A sort of intoxication, slumbrous and sweet, which refreshed the sense and sent sleep circulating like a gentle poison through the veins,—that sleep ineffable, languorous as a happy life,—

Digitized by Google

fell like a cloud between the past life and the life to come of the two lovers.

In the midst of that sleep full of dreams a continued noise was heard upon the upper floor, which at first disturbed La Vallière, but did not wholly arouse her attention. As the noise, however, continued, as it forced itself upon the attention, and recalled the poor girl from her dreams of happiness to the sad reality of life, she arose in a state of utter bewilderment, though beautiful in her disorder, saying, "Some one is waiting for me above. Louis, Louis, do you not hear?"—"Well, and am I not waiting for you also?" said the king, with infinite tenderness. "Let others henceforth wait for you." But she gently shook her head, as she replied with tears in her eyes, "Happiness concealed!—power concealed!—my pride should be silent as my heart."

The noise was again resumed. "I hear Montalais's voice," she said; and she hurried up the staircase. The king followed her, unable to let her leave his sight, and covering her hand with his kisses. "Yes, yes," repeated La Vallière, who had passed halfway through the opening; "yes, it is Montalais who is calling me. Something important must have happened."—"Go, then, dear love," said the king, "and return quickly."

"No, no, not to-day! Adieu, adieu!" she said, as she stooped down once more to embrace her lover, and then escaped. Montalais was, in fact, waiting for her, very pale and agitated. "Quick, quick! he is coming!" she said.

"Who?—who is coming?"—"He! I warned you of it."—"But who? You are killing me."—"Raoul," murmured Montalais.

"It is I,—I," said a joyous voice upon the last steps of the grand staircase. La Vallière uttered a terrible shriek and threw herself back. "Here I am, dear Louise," said Raoul, running forward. "Oh, I knew too well that you had not ceased to love me!" La Vallière, with a gesture partly of extreme terror and partly as if invoking a curse, attempted to speak, but could articulate only a single word. "No, no!" she said; and she fell into Montalais's arms, murmuring, "Do not come near me."

Montalais made a sign to Raoul, who stood almost petrified at the door, and did not even attempt to advance another step into the room. Then, looking towards the side of the room where the screen was, she exclaimed, "Imprudent girl! she has not even closed the trap-door." Montalais advanced towards the corner of the room to close, first, the screen, and then,

Digitized by Google

behind the screen, the trap-door. But suddenly the king, who had heard La Vallière's cry, darted through the opening, and hurried forward to her assistance. He threw himself on his knees before her, as he overwhelmed Montalais with questions, who hardly knew where she was. At the moment, however, that the king fell on his knees, a cry of utter despair rang through the corridor, accompanied by the sound of retreating footsteps. The king wished to run and see who had uttered the cry, and whose were the footsteps he had heard. It was in vain that Montalais sought to retain him, for the king, leaving La Vallière, hurried towards the door,—too late, however, for Raoul was already at a distance, and the king saw only a kind of shadow turning the angle of the corridor.

CHAPTER CLXXIX

TWO OLD FRIENDS

WHILE every one at court was busy with his own affairs, a man mysteriously took up his post behind the Place de Grève, in the house which we once saw besieged by D'Artagnan on the occasion of a riot. The principal entrance of this house was in the Place Baudoyer. The house was tolerably large, surrounded by gardens, enclosed in the Rue St. Jean by the shops of tool-makers, which protected it from prying looks; and was walled in by a triple rampart of stone, noise, and verdure, like an embalmed mummy in its triple coffin.

The man to whom we have just alluded walked along with a firm step, although he was no longer in his early prime. His dark cloak and long sword outlined beneath the cloak plainly revealed a man seeking adventures; and judging from his curling moustaches, his fine and smooth skin, as seen under his sombrero, the gallantry of his adventures was unquestionable. In fact, hardly had the cavalier entered the house, when the clock of St. Gervais struck eight; and ten minutes afterwards a lady, followed by an armed servant, approached and knocked at the same door, which an old woman immediately opened for her. The lady raised her veil as she entered; though no longer beautiful or young, she was still active, and of an imposing carriage. She concealed, beneath a rich toilet of exquisite taste, an age which Ninon de l'Enclos alone could have smiled at with

Digitized by Google

impunity. Hardly had she reached the vestibule, when the cavalier, whose features we have only roughly sketched, advanced towards her, holding out his hand. "Good-day, my dear Duchess," he said.—"How do you do, my dear Aramis?" replied the duchess.

He led her to an elegantly furnished apartment, on whose high windows were reflected the expiring rays of the setting sun, which filtered through the dark crests of some adjoining firs. They sat down side by side. Neither of them thought of asking for additional light in the room, and they buried themselves thus in the shadow, as if they had wished to bury themselves in forgetfulness.

"Chevalier," said the duchess, "you have never given me a single sign of life since our interview at Fontainebleau; and I confess that your presence there on the day of the Franciscan's death, and your initiation in certain secrets, caused me the liveliest astonishment I ever experienced in my whole life."—"I can explain my presence there to you, as well as my initiation," said Aramis.

"But let us, first of all," replied the duchess, quickly, "talk a little of ourselves, for our friendship is by no means of recent date."—"Yes, Madame; and if Heaven wills it, we shall continue to be friends,—I will not say for a long time, but for ever."—"That is quite certain, Chevalier, and my visit is a proof of it."—"Our interests, Madame the Duchess, are no longer the same that they used to be," said Aramis, smiling without reserve in the dim light, which could not show that his smile was less agreeable and less bright than formerly.—"No, Chevalier, at the present day we have other interests. Every period of life brings its own; and as we now understand each other in conversing as perfectly as we formerly did without saying a word, let us talk, if you like."

"I am at your orders, Duchess. Ah! I beg your pardon; how did you obtain my address, and what was your object?"—"You ask me why? I have told you. Curiosity, in the first place. I wished to know what you could have to do with the Franciscan with whom I had certain business, and who died so singularly. You know that on the occasion of our interview at Fontainebleau, in the cemetery, at the foot of the grave so recently closed, we were both so much overcome by our emotions that we omitted to confide anything to each other."—"Yes, Madame."

"Well, then, I had no sooner left you than I repented, and

Digitized by Google

have ever since been most anxious to ascertain the truth. You know that Madame de Longueville and myself are almost one, I suppose?"—"I was not aware of it," said Aramis, discreetly.—"I remembered, then," continued the duchess, "that neither of us said anything to the other in the cemetery; that you did not speak of the relationship in which you stood to the Franciscan, whose burial you had superintended, and that I did not refer to the position in which I stood to him,—all which seemed to me very unworthy of two such old friends as ourselves; and I have sought an opportunity of an interview with you in order to give you proof that I had found you, and that Marie Michon, now no more, has left behind her a representative with a good memory."

Aramis bowed over the duchess's hand, and pressed his lips upon it. "You must have had some trouble to find me again," he said.—"Yes," answered the duchess, annoyed to find the subject taking a turn which Aramis wished to give it; "but I knew that you were a friend of M. Fouquet, and so I inquired in that direction."

"A friend! Oh," exclaimed the chevalier, "you exaggerate, Madame! A poor priest who has been favoured by so generous a protector, and whose heart is full of gratitude and devotion to him, is all that I am to M. Fouquet."—"He made you a bishop?"—"Yes, Duchess."—"So, my fine musketeer, that is your retirement!"

"In the same way that political intrigue is for yourself," thought Aramis. "And so," he said, "you inquired after me at M. Fouquet's?"—"Easily enough. You had been to Fontainebleau with him, and had undertaken a voyage to your diocese,—which is Belle-Isle-en-Mer, I believe."—"No, Madame," said Aramis; "my diocese is Vannes."—"I meant that. I only thought that Belle-Isle-en-Mer—"—"Is a property belonging to M. Fouquet,—nothing more."

"Ah! I had been told that Belle-Isle was fortified; besides, I know that you are a military man, my friend."—"I have forgotten everything of the kind since I entered the church," said Aramis, annoyed.—"Very well. I then learned that you had returned from Vannes, and I sent to one of our friends, M. le Comte de la Fère, who is discretion itself; but he answered that he was not aware of your address."—"So like Athos," thought the bishop; "that which is actually good never alters."

"Well, then, you know that I cannot venture to show myself here, and that the queen-mother has always some grievance

Digitized by Google

or other against me."—"Yes, indeed; and I am surprised at it."—"Oh, there are various reasons for it! But, to continue, being obliged to conceal myself, I was fortunate enough to meet with M. d'Artagnan,—one of your old friends, I believe."—"A friend of mine still, Duchess."—"He gave me some information, and sent me to M. de Baisemeaux, the governor of the Bastille."

Aramis started; and a light flashed from his eyes in the darkness of the room which he could not conceal from his keen-sighted friend. "M. de Baisemeaux!" he said; "why did D'Artagnan send you to M. de Baisemeaux?"—"I cannot tell you."—"What can this possibly mean?" said the bishop, summoning all the resources of his mind to his aid, in order to carry on the combat in a befitting manner.

"M. de Baisemeaux is greatly indebted to you, D'Artagnan told me."—"True, he is so."—"And the address of a creditor is as easily ascertained as that of a debtor."—"Also very true; and so Baisemeaux indicated to you—"—"St. Mandé, where I forwarded a letter to you—"—"Which I have in my hand, and which is most precious to me," said Aramis, "because I am indebted to it for the pleasure of seeing you."

The duchess, satisfied at having so successfully passed over the various difficulties of so delicate an explanation, began to breathe freely again; which Aramis, however, could not succeed in doing. "We had got as far as your visit to Baisemeaux, I believe?" said he.—"Nay," said the duchess, laughing, "further than that."—"In that case we must have been speaking about your grudge against the queen-mother."—"Further still," returned the duchess, "further still; we were talking of the connection—"—"Which existed between you and the Franciscan," said Aramis, interrupting her eagerly; "well, I am listening to you very attentively."

"It is easily explained," returned the duchess, making up her mind. "You know that I am living at Brussels with M. de Laicques?"—"I have heard so, Madame."—"You know that my children have ruined and stripped me of everything?"—"How terrible, dear Duchess!"—"Terrible, indeed! This obliged me to resort to some means of obtaining a livelihood, and particularly to avoid vegetating. I had old hatreds to turn to account, old friendships to serve; I no longer had either credit or protectors."—"You, too, who had extended protection towards so many persons," said Aramis, blandly.

"It is always the case, Chevalier. Well, at that time I saw

Digitized by Google

the King [illegible] of Spain."—"Ah!"—"Who had just nominated a general [illegible]f the Jesuits, according to the usual custom."—"Is it usual, indeed?"—"Were you not aware of it?"—"I beg your pardon; I was inattentive."—"You must be aware of that,—you who were on such good terms with the Franciscan."—"With the general of the Jesuits, you mean?"

"Exactly. Well, then, I saw the King of Spain, who wished to do me a service, but was unable. He gave me recommendations, however, to Flanders, both for myself and for Laicques, and conferred a pension on me out of the funds of the order."—"Of Jesuits?"—"Yes. The general—I mean the Franciscan—was sent to me; and in order to give regularity to the transaction, in accordance with the statutes of the order, I was reputed to be in a position to render certain services. You are aware that that is the rule?"—"I was not aware of it."

Madame de Chevreuse paused to look at Aramis, but it was quite dark. "Well, such is the rule," she resumed. "I ought, therefore, to seem to possess a power of usefulness of some kind or other. I proposed to travel for the order, and I was placed on the list of affiliated travellers. You understand that it was a formality, by means of which I received my pension, which was very convenient for me."

"Good heavens! Duchess, what you tell me is like a dagger-thrust to me. *You* obliged to receive a pension from the Jesuits?"—"No, Chevalier; from Spain."—"Ah! except as a conscientious scruple, Duchess, you will admit that it is pretty nearly the same thing."—"No, not at all."

"But, surely, of your magnificent fortune there must remain—"—"Dampierre is all that remains."—"And that is handsome enough."—"Yes; but Dampierre is burdened, mortgaged, and somewhat in ruins, like its owner."

"And can the queen-mother see all that without shedding a tear?" said Aramis, with a penetrating look, which encountered nothing but the darkness.—"Yes, she has forgotten everything."—"You have, I believe, Duchess, attempted to get restored to favour?"—"Yes; but, most singularly, the young king inherits the antipathy that his dear father had for me. Ah, you too will tell me that I am indeed a woman to be hated, and that I am no longer one who can be loved."

"Dear Duchess, pray arrive soon at the circumstance which brought you here; for I think we can be of service to each other."—"Such has been my own thought. I came to Fontainebleau, then, with a double object in view. In the first

Digitized by Google

place, I was summoned there by the Franciscan whom you knew. By the by, how did you know him?—for I have told you my story, and have not yet heard yours."—"I knew him in a very natural way, Duchess. I studied theology with him at Parma; we became fast friends, but it happened, from time to time, that business or travels or war separated us for a time from each other."

"You were, of course, aware that he was the general of the Jesuits?"—"I suspected it."—"But by what extraordinary chance did you come to the hotel where the affiliated travellers had met together?"—"Oh," said Aramis, in a calm voice, "it was the merest chance in the world! I was going to Fontainebleau to see M. Fouquet, for the purpose of obtaining an audience of the king. I was passing by, unknown; I saw the poor dying monk in the road, and recognised him. You know the rest,—he died in my arms."

"Yes, but bequeathing to you so vast a power in heaven and on earth that you issue sovereign orders in his name."—"He did leave me a few commissions to settle."—"And for me?"—"I have told you,—a sum of twelve thousand livres was to be paid to you. I thought I had given you the necessary signature to enable you to receive it. Did you not get the money?"—"Oh, yes, yes! My dear prelate, you give your orders, I am informed, with so much mystery and such august majesty that it is generally believed you are the successor of the beloved dead."

Aramis coloured impatiently, and the duchess continued. "I have obtained information," she said, "from the King of Spain himself; and he dispelled my doubts on the point. Every general of the Jesuits is nominated by him, and must be a Spaniard, according to the statutes of the order. You are not a Spaniard, nor have you been nominated by the King of Spain." Aramis did not reply to this remark, except to say, "You see, Duchess, how greatly you were mistaken, since the King of Spain told you that."

"Yes, my dear Aramis; but there was something else of which I have been thinking."—"What is that?"—"You know that I do a great deal of desultory thinking; and it occurred to me that you know the Spanish language."—"Every Frenchman who has been actively engaged in the Fronde knows Spanish."—"You have lived in Flanders?"—"Three years."—"And have stayed at Madrid?"—"Fifteen months."—"You are in a position, then, to become a naturalised Spaniard when you like."

Digitized by Google

—"Really?" said Aramis, with a frankness which deceived the duchess.

"Undoubtedly. Two years' residence and an acquaintance with the language are indispensable. You have had three years and a half,—fifteen months more than is necessary."—"What are you driving at, my dear lady?"—"At this,—I am on good terms with the King of Spain."—"And I am not on bad terms," thought Aramis to himself.

"Do you wish me to ask the king," continued the duchess, "to confer the succession to the Franciscan's office upon you?"—"Oh, Duchess!"—"You have it already, perhaps?" she said.—"No, upon my honour."—"Very well, then, I can render you that service."

"Why did you not render the same service to M. de Laicques, Duchess? He is a very talented man, and one whom you love."—"Yes, no doubt; but that is not to be considered. At all events, putting Laicques aside, answer me, will you have it?"—"No, I thank you, Duchess."

She paused. "He is nominated," she thought; and then resumed aloud, "If you refuse me in this manner, it is not very encouraging for me to ask anything of you."—"Oh, ask, pray ask!"—"Ask! I cannot do so if you have not the power to grant what I want."—"However limited my power and ability, ask all the same."—"I need a sum of money to restore Dampierre."

"Ah!" replied Aramis, coldly, "money? Well, Duchess, how much would you require?"—"Oh, a tolerably round sum!"—"So much the worse,—you know I am not rich."—"No, you are not; but the order is. And if you had been the general—"—"You know I am not the general."—"In that case you have a friend who must be very wealthy,—M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet! He is more than half ruined, Madame."—"So it is said, but I would not believe it."—"Why, Duchess?"—"Because I have, or rather Laicques has, certain letters in his possession from Cardinal Mazarin, which establish the existence of very strange accounts."—"What accounts?"—"Relative to various sums of money borrowed and disposed of. I do not fully remember; but the point is that the superintendent, according to these letters, which are signed by Mazarin, had taken thirty millions from the coffers of the State. The case is a very serious one."

Aramis clinched his hands in anxiety and apprehension. "Is it possible," he said, "that you have such letters, and have not

Digitized by Google

communicated them to M. Fouquet?"—"Ah!" replied the duchess, "I keep such little matters as these in reserve. When the day of need comes, we will take them from the closet."—"And that day has arrived?" said Aramis.—"Yes."—"And you are going to show those letters to M. Fouquet?"—"I prefer instead to talk about them with you."

"You must be in sad want of money, my poor friend, to think of such things as these,—you, too, who held M. de Mazarin's prose effusions in such indifferent esteem."—"The fact is, I am in want of money."—"And then," continued Aramis, in cold accents, "it must have been very distressing to you to be obliged to have recourse to such a means. It is cruel."

"Oh, if I had wished to do harm instead of good," said Madame de Chevreuse, "instead of asking the general of the order or M. Fouquet for the five hundred thousand livres I require"—"Five hundred thousand livres!"—"Yes; no more. Do you think it much? I require at least as much as that to restore Dampierre."—"Yes, Madame."—"I say, therefore, that instead of asking for this amount I should have gone to see my old friend the queen-mother; the letters from her husband, the Signor Mazarini, would have served me as an introduction, and I should have begged this mere trifle of her, saying to her, 'I wish, Madame, to have the honour of receiving your Majesty at Dampierre. Permit me to put Dampierre in a fit state for that purpose.'"

Aramis did not say a single word in reply. "Well," she said, "what are you thinking about?"—"I am making certain additions," said Aramis.—"And M. Fouquet makes subtractions. I, on the other hand, am trying the art of multiplication. What excellent calculators we are! How well we could understand one another!"

"Will you allow me to reflect?" said Aramis.—"No; to such an overture between persons like ourselves, 'Yes' or 'No' should be the reply, and that immediately."—"It is a snare," thought the bishop; "it is impossible that Anne of Austria would listen to such a woman as this."

"Well!" said the Duchess.—"Well, Madame, I should be very much astonished if M. Fouquet had five hundred thousand livres at his disposal at the present moment."—"It is of no use speaking of it further, then," said the duchess, "and Dampierre must get restored how it can."—"Oh, you are not embarrassed to such an extent as that, I suppose?"—"No; I am never embarrassed."

Digitized by Google

"And the queen," continued the bishop, "will certainly do for you what the superintendent is unable to do."—"Oh, certainly! But tell me, do you not think it would be better that I should speak myself to M. Fouquet about these letters?"—"You will do whatever you please in that respect, Duchess. M. Fouquet either feels or does not feel himself to be guilty. If he really be so, I know that he is proud enough not to confess it; if he be not so, he will be exceedingly offended at your menace."—"As usual, you reason like an angel," said the duchess, rising.

"And so you are going to denounce M. Fouquet to the queen," said Aramis.—"Denounce? Oh, what a disagreeable word! I shall not denounce, my dear friend. You now know matters of policy too well to be ignorant how easily these affairs are arranged. I shall merely side against M. Fouquet, and nothing more; and in a war of party against party a weapon is a weapon."—"No doubt."—"And once on friendly terms again with the queen-mother, I may be dangerous towards some persons."—"You are at perfect liberty to be so, Duchess."—"A liberty of which I shall avail myself, my dear friend."

"You are not ignorant, I suppose, Duchess, that M. Fouquet is on the best terms with the King of Spain?"—"Oh, I suppose so!"—"If, therefore, you begin a party warfare against M. Fouquet, he will reply in the same way; for he too is at perfect liberty to do so, is he not?"—"Oh, certainly!"

"And as he is on good terms with Spain, he will make use of that friendship as a weapon."—"You mean that he will be on good terms with the general of the order of the Jesuits, my dear Aramis."—"That may be the case, Duchess."—"And that, consequently, the pension I have been receiving from the order will be stopped."—"I am greatly afraid it might be."—"Well, I must contrive to console myself; for after Richelieu, after the Frondes, after exile, what is there left for Madame de Chevreuse to fear?"

"The pension, you are aware, is forty-eight thousand livres."—"Alas! I am quite aware of it."—"Moreover, in party contests, you know, the friends of the enemy do not escape."—"Ah! you mean that poor Laicques will have to suffer."—"I am afraid it is almost inevitable, Duchess."

"Oh, he receives only twelve thousand livres' pension."—"Yes, but the King of Spain has some influence left; advised by M. Fouquet, he might get M. Laicques shut up in some fortress."—"I have no great fear of that, my good friend;

Digitized by Google

because, thanks to a reconciliation with Anne of Austria, I will undertake that France shall insist upon Laicques's liberation." —"True. In that case you will have something else to apprehend."—"What can that be?" said the duchess, pretending to be surprised and terrified.

"You will learn,—indeed, you must know it already—that having once been an affiliated member of the order, it is not easy to leave it; for the secrets that any particular member may have acquired are unwholesome, and carry with them the germs of misfortune for whoever may reveal them." The duchess considered for a moment, and then said, "That is more serious; I will think it over."

Notwithstanding the profound obscurity in which he sat, Aramis seemed to feel a burning glance, like a hot iron, escape from his friend's eyes and plunge into his heart. "Let us recapitulate," said Aramis, determined to keep himself on his guard, and gliding his hand into his breast, where he had a dagger concealed.

"Exactly, let us recapitulate; good accounts make good friends."—"The suppression of your pension—"—"Forty-eight thousand livres and that of Laicques's twelve make together sixty thousand livres; that is what you mean, I suppose?"—"Precisely; and I was trying to find out what would be your equivalent for that."—"Five hundred thousand livres, which I shall get from the queen."—"Or which you will not get."—"I know a means of procuring them," said the duchess, thoughtlessly.

This remark made the chevalier prick up his ears; and from the moment when his adversary had committed this error, his mind was so thoroughly on its guard that he seemed every moment to gain the advantage more and more, and she, consequently, to lose it. "I will admit, for argument's sake, that you obtain the money," he resumed; "you will lose twice as much, having a hundred thousand livres' pension to receive instead of sixty thousand, and that for a period of ten years."—"Not so, for I shall only be subjected to this diminution of my income during the period of M. Fouquet's remaining in power,—a period which I estimate at two months."—"Ah!" said Aramis.

"I am frank, you see."—"I thank you for it, Duchess; but you would be wrong to suppose that after M. Fouquet's disgrace the order would resume the payment of your pension."—"I know a means of making the order come down with its money, as I know a means of forcing the queen-mother to concede what

Digitized by Google

I require."—"In that case, Duchess, we are all obliged to strike our colors to you. The victory is yours, and the triumph also is yours. Be clement, I entreat you!"

"But is it possible," resumed the duchess, without taking notice of the irony, "that you really draw back from a miserable sum of five hundred thousand livres when it is a question of sparing you—I mean your friend—I beg your pardon, I ought rather to say your protector—the disagreeable consequences which a party contest produces?"

"Duchess, I will tell you why. Supposing the five hundred thousand livres were to be given to you, M. de Laicques will require his share, which will be another five hundred thousand livres, I presume; and then, after M. de Laicques's and your own portions, will come the portions for your children, your poor pensioners, and various other persons; and these letters, however compromising they may be, are not worth from three to four millions. Good heavens! Duchess, the Queen of France's diamonds were surely worth more than these bits of waste paper signed by Mazarin; and yet their recovery did not cost a fourth part of what you ask for yourself."—"Yes, that is true; but the merchant values his goods at his own price, and it is for the purchaser to buy or to refuse."

"Stay a moment, Duchess; would you like me to tell you why I will not buy your letters?"—"Pray tell me."—"Because the letters which you say are Mazarin's are false."—"Nonsense!"—"I have no doubt of it; for it would, to say the least, be very singular that after you had quarrelled with the queen through M. Mazarin's means, you should have kept up any intimate acquaintance with the latter; it would savour of passion, of treachery, of— Upon my word, I do not like to make use of the term."—"Oh, pray say it!"—"Of compliance."

"That is quite true; but what is not less so is that which the letter contains."—"I pledge you my word, Duchess, that you will not be able to make use of it with the queen."—"Oh, yes, indeed; I can make use of everything with the queen."—"Very good," thought Aramis. "Croak on, old owl! hiss, viper that you are!"

But the duchess had said enough, and advanced a few steps towards the door. Aramis, however, had reserved a humiliation which she did not expect,—the imprecation of the vanquished behind the car of the conqueror. He rang the bell. Candles immediately appeared in the room; and the bishop

found himself completely encircled by lights, which shone upon the worn, haggard face of the duchess. Aramis fixed a long and ironical look upon her pale and withered cheeks, upon her dim, dull eyes, and upon her lips, which she kept carefully closed over her blackened and scanty teeth. He, however, had thrown himself into a graceful attitude, with his haughty and intelligent head thrown back; he smiled so as to reveal his teeth, which were still brilliant and dazzling in the candle-light. The old coquette understood the trick that had been played upon her. She was standing immediately before a large mirror, in which all her decrepitude, so carefully concealed, was only made more manifest by the contrast. Thereupon, without even saluting Aramis, who bowed with the ease and grace of the musketeer of early days, she hurried away with tottering steps, which her very haste only the more impeded. Aramis sprang across the room like a zephyr to lead her to the door. Madame de Chevreuse made a sign to her huge lackey, who resumed his musket; and she left the house where such tender friends had not been able to understand each other only because they had understood each other too well.

CHAPTER CLXXX

WHEREIN MAY BE SEEN THAT A BARGAIN WHICH CANNOT BE MADE WITH ONE PERSON CAN BE CARRIED OUT WITH ANOTHER

ARAMIS had been perfectly correct in his supposition. Immediately on leaving the house in the Place Baudoyer, Madame de Chevreuse had proceeded homeward. She was doubtless afraid of being followed, and had sought in this way to cover her steps; but as soon as she had arrived within the door of the hotel, and assured herself that no one who could cause her any uneasiness was on her track, she opened the door of the garden leading into another street, and hurried towards the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, where M. Colbert resided. We have already said that evening, or rather night, had closed in,—and it was a dark, thick night. Paris had once more sunk into its calm, quiescent state, enshrouding alike within its indulgent mantle the high-born duchess carrying out her political intrigue, and the simple citizen's wife who having been detained late by a supper in the city was proceeding homewards, on the arm of a lover, by the longest possible route.

Digitized by Google

Madame de Chevreuse had been too well accustomed to nocturnal politics not to know that a minister never denies himself, even at his own private residence, to any young and beautiful woman who may chance to object to the dust and confusion of a public office; or to old women, as full of experience as of years, who dislike the indiscreet echo of official residences. A valet received the duchess under the peristyle, and received her, it must be admitted, with some indifference of manner; he intimated, after having looked at her face, that it was hardly at such an hour that one so advanced in years as herself could be permitted to disturb M. Colbert's important occupations. But Madame de Chevreuse, without disquietude, wrote her name upon a leaf of her tablets,—a blusterous name, which had so often sounded disagreeably in the ears of Louis XIII. and of the great cardinal. She wrote her name in the large ill-formed characters of the higher classes of that period, folded the paper in a manner peculiarly her own, and handed it to the valet without uttering a word, but with so haughty and imperious a gesture that the fellow, well accustomed to judge of people from their manners and appearance, perceived at once the quality of the person before him, bowed his head, and ran to M. Colbert's room.

The minister could not control a sudden exclamation as he opened the paper; and the valet, gathering from it the interest with which his master regarded the mysterious visitor, returned as fast as he could to beg the duchess to follow him. She ascended to the first floor of the beautiful new house very slowly, rested herself on the landing-place in order not to enter the apartment out of breath, and appeared before M. Colbert, who with his own hands held open the folding-doors. The duchess paused at the threshold for the purpose of studying well the character of the man with whom she was about to converse. At the first glance the round, large, heavy head, thick brows, and ill-favoured features of Colbert, who wore, thrust low down on his head, a cap like a priest's *calotte*, seemed to indicate that but little difficulty was likely to be met with in her negotiations with him, but also that she was to expect little interest in the discussion of particulars; for there was scarcely any indication that that rude man could be susceptible to the attractions of a refined revenge or of an exalted ambition. But when on closer inspection the duchess perceived the small, piercingly black eyes, the longitudinal wrinkles of his high and massive forehead, the imperceptible twitching of the lips, on which were

Digitized by Google

apparent traces of rough good-humour, she changed her mind and said to herself, "I have found the man I want."

"What has procured me the honour of your visit, Madame?" he inquired.—"The need I have of you, Monsieur," returned the duchess, "and that which you have of me."—"I am delighted, Madame, with the first portion of your sentence; but so far as the second portion is concerned—"

Madame de Chevreuse sat down in the arm-chair which M. Colbert placed before her. "M. Colbert, you are the intendant of finances?"—"Yes, Madame."—"And are ambitious of becoming the superintendent?"—"Madame!"—"Nay, do not deny it! That would only unnecessarily prolong our conversation,—it is useless."—"And yet, Madame," replied the intendant, "however well disposed and inclined to show politeness I may be towards a lady of your position and merit, nothing will make me confess that I have ever entertained the idea of supplanting my superior."

"I said nothing about supplanting, M. Colbert. Could I accidentally have made use of that word? I hardly think so. The word 'replace' is less aggressive in its signification, and more grammatically suitable, as M. de Voiture would say. I presume, therefore, that you are ambitious of replacing M. Fouquet."—"M. Fouquet's fortune, Madame, enables him to withstand all attempts. The superintendent in this age plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; the vessels pass beneath him, and do not overthrow him."

"I ought to have availed myself of that very comparison. It is true. M. Fouquet plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; but I remember to have heard it said by M. Conrart (a member of the Academy, I believe), that when the Colossus of Rhodes fell from its lofty position, the merchant who had cast it down—a merchant, nothing more, M. Colbert—loaded four hundred camels with the ruins. A merchant!—that is considerably less than an intendant of finances."—"Madame, I can assure you that I shall never overthrow M. Fouquet."

"Very good, M. Colbert, since you persist in showing so much sensitiveness with me, as if you were ignorant that I am Madame de Chevreuse, and also that I am somewhat advanced in years,—in other words, that you have to do with a woman who has had political dealings with the Cardinal de Richelieu, and who has no time to lose,—since, I say, you commit that imprudence, I shall go and find others who are more intelligent and more desirous of making their fortunes."—"How, Madame, how?"

Digitized by Google

—"You give me a very poor idea of the negotiations of the present day, Monsieur. I assure you that if in my time a woman had gone to M. de Cinq-Mars, who was not moreover a man of a very high order of intellect, and had said to him about the cardinal what I have just now said to you of M. Fouquet, M. de Cinq-Mars would by this time have put his irons in the fire."

"Nay, Madame, show a little indulgence."—"Well, then, you do really consent to replace M. Fouquet?"—"Certainly, I do, if the king dismisses M. Fouquet."

"Again a word too much; it is quite evident that if you have not yet succeeded in driving M. Fouquet from his post, it is because you have not been able to do so. Therefore I should be a simpleton if in coming to you I did not bring you the very thing you require."—"I am distressed to be obliged to persist, Madame," said Colbert, after a silence which enabled the duchess to sound the depth of his dissimulation; "but I must warn you that for the last six years denunciation after denunciation has been made against M. Fouquet, and he has remained unshaken and unaffected by them."

"There is a time for everything, M. Colbert; those who were the authors of such denunciations were not called Madame de Chevreuse, and they had no proofs equal to the six letters from M. de Mazarin which establish the offence in question."—"The offence!"—"The crime, if you like it better."—"The crime—committed by M. Fouquet!"—"Nothing less. It is rather strange, M. Colbert; but your face, which just now was cold and indifferent, is now all lighted up."

"A crime!"—"I am delighted to see it makes an impression upon you."—"Oh, that is a word, Madame, which embraces so many things!"—"It embraces the post of superintendent of finance for yourself, and a letter of exile or the Bastille for M. Fouquet."—"Forgive me, Madame the Duchess, but it is almost impossible that M. Fouquet can be exiled; to be imprisoned or disgraced, that alone is much."

"Oh, I am perfectly aware of what I am saying!" returned Madame de Chevreuse, coldly. "I do not live at such a distance from Paris as not to know what takes place there. The king does not like M. Fouquet, and he would willingly sacrifice the superintendent if an opportunity were only presented."—"It must be a good one, though."—"Good enough, and one I estimate to be worth five hundred thousand livres."—"In what way?" said Colbert.—"I mean, Monsieur, that holding this

Digitized by Google

opportunity in my own hands, I will not allow it to be transferred to yours except for a sum of five hundred thousand livres."

"I understand you perfectly, Madame. But since you have fixed a price for the sale, let me now see the value of the articles to be sold."—"Oh, a mere trifle,—six letters, as I have already told you, from M. de Mazarin; and the autographs will most assuredly not be regarded as too costly, if they establish in an irrefutable manner that M. Fouquet has embezzled large sums of money from the treasury and appropriated them to his own purposes."—"In an irrefutable manner, do you say?" observed Colbert, whose eyes sparkled with delight.—"Irrefutable; would you like to read the letters?"—"With all my heart! Copies, of course?"

"Of course, the copies," said the duchess, as she drew from her bosom a small packet of papers flattened by her velvet bodice. "Read!" she said. Colbert eagerly snatched the papers and devoured them. "Wonderful!" he said.—"It is clear enough, is it not?"—"Yes, Madame, yes. M. Mazarin must have handed the money to M. Fouquet, who must have kept it for his own purposes; but the question is, what money?"—"Exactly,—what money; if we come to terms, I will join to these six letters a seventh, which will supply you with the fullest particulars."

Colbert reflected. "And the originals of these letters?"—"A useless question to ask; exactly as if I were to ask you, M. Colbert, whether the money-bags you will give me will be full or empty."—"Very good, Madame."—"Is it concluded?"—"No; for there is one circumstance to which neither of us has given any attention."—"Name it!"

"M. Fouquet can be utterly ruined, under the circumstances you have detailed, only by means of legal proceedings."—"Well?"—"A public scandal."—"Yes, what then?"—"Neither the legal proceedings nor the scandal can be begun against him."—"Why not?"—"Because he is procureur-général of the parliament; because, too, in France, the government, the army, the courts of law, and commerce are intimately connected by ties of good-will, which people call *esprit de corps*. So, Madame, the parliament will never permit its chief to be dragged before a public tribunal; and never, even if he be dragged there by royal authority, never will he be condemned."

"Ah! *ma foi!* M. Colbert, that doesn't concern me."—"I am aware of that, Madame; but it concerns me, and it consequently diminishes the value of what you have brought to

me. Of what use to bring me a proof of crime, without the possibility of condemnation?"—"Even if he be only suspected, M. Fouquet will lose his post of superintendent."

"That would be a great achievement!" exclaimed Colbert, whose dark, gloomy features were momentarily lighted up by an expression of hate and vengeance.—"Ah, ah! M. Colbert," said the duchess, "forgive me, but I did not think you were so impressionable. Very good; in that case, since you need more than I have to give you, there is no occasion to speak of the matter further."

"Yes, Madame, we will go on talking of it; only, as the value of your commodities has decreased, you must lower your price."—"You are bargaining, then?"—"Every man who wishes to deal loyally is obliged to do so."—"How much will you offer me?"—"Two hundred thousand livres," said Colbert.

The duchess laughed in his face, and then said suddenly, "Wait a moment, I have another arrangement to propose; will you give me three hundred thousand livres?"—"No, no."—"Oh, you can either accept or refuse my terms; besides, that is not all."—"More still? You are becoming too impracticable to deal with, Madame."—"Less so than you think, perhaps, for it is not money I am going to ask you for."—"What is it, then?"—"A service. You know that I have always been most affectionately attached to the queen, and I am desirous of having an interview with her Majesty."

"With the queen?"—"Yes, M. Colbert, with the queen, who is, I admit, no longer my friend, and who has ceased to be so for a long time past, but who may again become so if the opportunity be only given her."—"Her Majesty has ceased to receive any one, Madame. She is a great sufferer, and you may be aware that the paroxysms of her disease occur with greater frequency than ever."

"That is the very reason why I wish to have an interview with her Majesty. In Flanders we have many diseases of that kind."—"Cancers?—a fearful, incurable disorder."—"Do not believe that, M. Colbert. The Flemish peasant is something of a savage; he has not a wife exactly, but a female."—"Well, Madame?"—"Well, M. Colbert, while he is smoking his pipe, the woman works; it is she who draws the water from the well,—she who loads the mule or the ass, and even bears herself a portion of the burden. Taking but little care of herself, she gets knocked about here and there, sometimes is even beaten. Cancers arise from contusions."—"True, true!" said Colbert.

"The Flemish women do not die the sooner on that account. When they are great sufferers from this disease, they go in search of remedies; and the Béguines of Bruges are excellent doctors for every kind of disease. They have precious waters of one sort or another,—specifics of various kinds; and they give a bottle and a wax candle to the sufferer. They derive a profit from the priests, and serve God by the disposal of their two articles of merchandise. I will take the queen some of this holy water, which I will procure from the Béguines of Bruges; her Majesty will recover, and will burn as many wax candles as she may think fit. You see, M. Colbert, to prevent my seeing the queen is almost as bad as committing the crime of regicide."

"You are, Madame the Duchess, a woman of great intelligence. You surprise me; still, I cannot but suppose that this charitable consideration towards the queen covers some small personal interest of your own."—"Have I tried to conceal it, M. Colbert? You spoke, I believe, of a small personal interest. Understand, then, that it is a great interest; and I will prove it to you by resuming what I was saying. If you procure me a personal interview with her Majesty, I will be satisfied with the three hundred thousand livres I have demanded; if not, I shall keep my letters, unless, indeed, you give me on the spot five hundred thousand livres for them."

And rising from her seat with this decisive remark, the old duchess left M. Colbert in a disagreeable perplexity. To bargain any further was out of the question; not to purchase would involve infinite loss. "Madame," he said, "I shall have the pleasure of handing you over a hundred thousand crowns; but how shall I get the actual letters themselves?"—"In the simplest manner in the world, my dear M. Colbert,—whom will you trust?" The financier began to laugh silently, so that his large eyebrows went up and down like the wings of a bat upon the deep lines of his yellow forehead. "No one," he said.

"You surely will make an exception in your own favour, M. Colbert?"—"How is that, Madame?"—"I mean that if you would take the trouble to accompany me to the place where the letters are, they would be delivered into your own hands, and you would be able to verify and check them."—"Quite true."—"You would bring the hundred thousand crowns with you at the same time?—for I too do not trust any one."

Colbert coloured to the tips of his ears. Like all eminent men in the art of figures, he was of an insolent and mathematical probity. "I will take with me, Madame," he said, "two orders

for the amount agreed upon, payable at my treasury. Will that satisfy you?"—"Would that the orders on your treasury were for two millions, Monsieur the Intendant! I shall have the pleasure of showing you the way, then?"—"Allow me to order my carriage."—"I have a carriage below, Monsieur."

Colbert coughed like an irresolute man. He imagined for a moment that the proposition of the duchess was a snare; that perhaps some one was waiting at the door; and that she, whose secret had just been sold to Colbert for a hundred thousand crowns, had already offered it to Fouquet for the same sum. As he still hesitated a good deal, the duchess looked at him full in the face. "You prefer your own carriage?" she said.—"I admit that I do."—"You suppose that I am going to lead you into a snare or trap of some sort or other?"—"Madame the Duchess, you have the character of being somewhat inconsiderate at times; and as I am clothed in a sober, solemn character, a jest or practical joke might compromise me."

"Yes; the fact is, you are afraid. Well, then, take your own carriage, as many servants as you like. Only, consider well,—what we two may arrange between us, we are the only persons who know it; what a third person may witness, we announce to the universe. After all, I do not make a point of it; my carriage shall follow yours, and I shall be satisfied to accompany you in your own carriage to the queen."—"To the queen!"—"Have you forgotten that already? Is it possible that one of the clauses of the agreement, of so much importance to me, can have escaped you already? How trifling it seems to you, indeed! If I had known it, I should have doubled my price."

"I have reflected, Madame, and I shall not accompany you."—"Really,—and why not?"—"Because I have the most perfect confidence in you."—"You overpower me. But how do I receive the hundred thousand crowns?"—"Here they are, Madame," said Colbert, scribbling a few lines on a piece of paper, which he handed to the duchess, adding, "You are paid."

"The trait is a fine one, M. Colbert, and I will reward you for it," she said, beginning to laugh. Madame de Chevreuse's laugh had a very sinister sound. Every man who feels youth, faith, love, life itself, throbbing in his heart, would prefer tears to such a lamentable laugh.

The duchess opened the front of her dress and drew forth from her bosom, somewhat less white than it once had been, a small packet of papers, tied with a flame-coloured ribbon, and still laughing, she said, "There, M. Colbert, are the originals of

Cardinal Mazarin's letters. They are now your own property," she added, refastening the body of her dress. "Your fortune is secured; and now accompany me to the queen."—"No, Madame; if you are again about to run the chance of her Majesty's displeasure, and it were known at the Palais-Royal that I had been the means of introducing you there, the queen would never forgive me while she lived. No; there are certain persons at the palace who are devoted to me, who will procure you an admission without my being compromised."—"Just as you please, provided I enter."

"What do you term those religious women at Bruges who cure disorders?"—"Béguines."—"Good; you are a Béguine."—"As you please, but I must soon cease to be one."—"That is your affair."—"Excuse me, but I do not wish to be exposed to a refusal."—"That is again your own affair, Madame. I am going to give directions to the head valet of the gentleman in waiting on her Majesty to allow admission to a Béguine, who brings an effectual remedy for her Majesty's sufferings. You are the bearer of my letter, you will undertake to be provided with the remedy, and will give every explanation on the subject. I admit a knowledge of a Béguine, but I deny all knowledge of Madame de Chevreuse. Here, Madame, then, is your letter of introduction."

CHAPTER CLXXXI

THE SKIN OF THE BEAR

COLBERT handed the duchess the letter, and gently drew aside the chair behind which she was standing. Madame de Chevreuse, with a very slight bow, immediately left the room. Colbert, who had recognised Mazarin's handwriting and had counted the letters, rang to summon his secretary, whom he enjoined to go in immediate search of M. Vanel, a counsellor of the parliament. The secretary replied that, according to his usual practice, M. Vanel had just at that moment entered the house, in order to render to the intendant an account of the principal details of the business which had been transacted during the day in the sitting of the parliament. Colbert approached one of the lamps, read the letters of the deceased cardinal over again, smiled repeatedly as he recognised the great value of the papers which Madame de Chevreuse had just

Digitized by Google

delivered to him, and burying his head in his hands for a few minutes reflected profoundly. In the meantime a tall, large-made man entered the room; his spare, thin face, steady look, and hooked nose, as he entered Colbert's cabinet with a modest assurance of manner, revealed a character at once supple and decided,—supple towards the master who could throw him the prey; firm towards the dogs who might possibly be disposed to dispute it with him. M. Vanel carried a voluminous bundle of papers under his arm, and placed it on the desk on which Colbert was leaning both his elbows, as he supported his head.

"Good-day, M. Vanel," said the latter, rousing himself from his meditation.—"Good-day, Monseigneur," said Vanel, naturally.—"You should say 'Monsieur,' and not 'Monseigneur,'" replied Colbert, gently.—"We give the title of 'Monseigneur' to ministers," returned Vanel, with extreme self-possession, "and you are a minister."—"Not yet."—"You are so in point of fact, and I call you 'Monseigneur' accordingly; besides, you are my seigneur, and that is sufficient. If you dislike my calling you 'Monseigneur' before others, allow me, at least, to call you so in private."

Colbert raised his head to the height of the lamps, and read, or tried to read, upon Vanel's face how much actual sincerity entered into this protestation of devotion. But the counsellor knew perfectly well how to sustain the weight of his look, even were it armed with the full authority of the title he had conferred. Colbert sighed. He had read nothing in Vanel's face; Vanel might be sincere. Colbert recollected that this man, inferior to himself, was superior to him in having an unfaithful wife. At the moment he was pitying this man's lot, Vanel coolly drew from his pocket a perfumed letter, sealed with Spanish wax, and held it towards Colbert, saying, "A letter from my wife, Monseigneur." Colbert coughed, took, opened and read the letter, and then put it carefully away in his pocket; while Vanel, unconcerned, turned over the leaves of the papers he had brought with him.

"Vanel," Colbert said suddenly to his *protégé*, "you are a hard-working man!"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"Would twelve hours of labour frighten you?"—"I work fifteen hours every day."—"Impossible! A counsellor need not work more than three hours a day in the parliament."—"Oh! I am working up some returns for a friend of mine in the department of accounts; and as I still have time left on my hands, I am studying Hebrew."

"Your reputation stands high in the parliament, Vanel."—

"I believe so, Monseigneur."—"You must not grow rusty in your post of counsellor."—"What must I do to avoid it?"—"Purchase a high place. Small ambitions are the most difficult to satisfy."—"Small purses are the most difficult to fill, Monseigneur."—"What post have you in view?" said Colbert.

"I see none,—not one."—"There is one, certainly; but one need be the king himself to be able to buy it without inconvenience; and the king will not be inclined, I suppose, to purchase the post of procureur-général."

At these words Vanel fixed his dull and humble look upon Colbert, who could hardly tell whether Vanel had comprehended him or not. "Why do you speak to me, Monseigneur," said Vanel, "of the post of procureur-général to the parliament? I know no other post than the one M. Fouquet fills."—"Exactly so, my dear counsellor."—"You are not over-fastidious, Monseigneur; but before the post can be bought, it must be offered for sale."—"I believe, M. Vanel, that it will be for sale before long."—"For sale? What! M. Fouquet's post of procureur-général?"—"So it is said."—"The post which renders him inviolable, for sale! Oh, oh!" said Vanel, beginning to laugh.

"Would you be afraid, then, of the post?" said Colbert, gravely.—"Afraid! no; but—"—"Nor desirous of obtaining it?"—"You are laughing at me, Monseigneur," replied Vanel; "is it likely that a counsellor of the parliament would not be desirous of becoming procureur-général?"

"Well, M. Vanel, since I tell you that the post will be shortly for sale—"—"I cannot help repeating, Monseigneur, that it is impossible; a man never throws away the buckler behind which he maintains his honour, his fortune, and his life."—"There are certain men mad enough, Vanel, to fancy themselves out of the reach of all mischances."—"Yes, Monseigneur; but such men never commit their mad acts for the advantage of the poor Vanels of the world."—"Why not?"—"For the very reason that those Vanels are poor."

"It is true that M. Fouquet's post might cost a good round sum. What would you bid for it, M. Vanel?"—"Everything I am worth."—"Which means—"—"Three or four hundred thousand livres."—"And the post is worth—"—"A million and a half, at the very lowest. I know persons who have offered seventeen hundred thousand livres, without being able to persuade M. Fouquet to sell. Besides, supposing it were to happen that M. Fouquet wished to sell,—which I do not believe, in spite of what I have been told—"

Digitized by Google

"Ah, you have heard something about it, then! Who told you?"—"M. Gourville, M. Pellisson, and others."—"Very good; if, therefore, M. Fouquet did wish to sell—"—"I could not buy it just yet, since the superintendent will only sell for ready money, and no one has a million and a half to throw down at once."

Colbert suddenly interrupted the counsellor by an imperious gesture; he had begun to meditate. Observing his superior's serious attitude, and his perseverance in continuing the conversation on this subject, Vanel awaited the solution without venturing to precipitate it. "Explain fully to me," said Colbert, at length, "the privileges of the office of procureur-général."

"The right of impeaching every French subject who is not a prince of the blood; the right of quashing all proceedings taken against any Frenchman who is neither king nor prince. The procureur-général is the arm of the king to strike the evil-doer,—his arm also to extinguish the torch of justice. M. Fouquet, therefore, will be able, by stirring up the parliament, to maintain himself even against the king; and the king also, by humouring M. Fouquet, can get his edicts registered without opposition. The procureur-général can be a very useful or a very dangerous instrument."

"Vanel, would you like to be procureur-général?" said Colbert, suddenly, softening both his look and his voice.—"I!" exclaimed the latter; "I have already had the honour to represent to you that I want about eleven hundred thousand livres to make up the amount."—"Borrow that sum from your friends."—"I have no friends richer than myself."—"You are an honourable man, Vanel."—"Ah, Monseigneur, if the world were to think as you do!"—"I think so, and that is quite enough; and if it should be needed, I will be your security."

"Remember the proverb, Monseigneur."—"What is that?"—"'The endorser pays.'"—"Let that make no difference." Vanel rose, quite bewildered by this offer, which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly made to him by a man who treated the smallest affairs in a serious spirit. "You are not trifling with me, Monseigneur?" he said.

"Stay! we must act quickly. You say that M. Gourville has spoken to you about M. Fouquet's post?"—"Yes, and M. Pellisson also."—"Officially or officiously?"—"These were their words: 'These parliamentary people are ambitious and wealthy; they ought to get together two or three millions among

themselves, to present to their protector and great luminary, M. Fouquet.' "—"And what did you reply?"—"I said that, for my own part, I would give ten thousand livres if necessary."

"Ah, you like M. Fouquet, then!" exclaimed Colbert, with a look full of hatred.—"No; but M. Fouquet is our chief. He is in debt,—is on the high-road to ruin; and we ought to save the honour of the body of which we are members."—"This explains to me why M. Fouquet will be always safe and sound so long as he occupies his present post," replied Colbert.

"Thereupon," said Vanel, "M. Gourville added: 'If we were to do anything out of charity to M. Fouquet, it could not be otherwise than most humiliating to him; and he would be sure to refuse it. Let the parliament subscribe among themselves to purchase in a proper manner the post of procureur-général. In that case all would go on well; the honour of our body would be saved, and M. Fouquet's pride spared.' "—"That is an opening."—"I considered it so, Monseigneur."

"Well, M. Vanel, you will go at once, and find out either M. Gourville or M. Pellisson. Do you know any other friend of M. Fouquet?"—"I know M. de la Fontaine very well."—"La Fontaine, the rhymester?"—"Yes; he used to write verses to my wife, when M. Fouquet was one of our friends."—"Go to him, then, and try to procure an interview with the superintendent."

"Willingly—but the sum?"—"On the day and hour when you arrange to settle the matter, M. Vanel, you shall be supplied with the money; so do not make yourself uneasy on that account."—"Monseigneur, such munificence! You eclipse kings even,—you surpass M. Fouquet himself."—"Stay a moment! Do not let us mistake each other. I do not make you a present of fourteen hundred thousand livres, M. Vanel, for I have children to provide for; but I will lend you that sum."

"Ask whatever interest, whatever security you please, Monseigneur; I am quite ready. And when all your requisitions are satisfied, I will still repeat that you surpass kings and M. Fouquet in munificence. What conditions do you impose?"—"The repayment in eight years, and a mortgage upon the appointment itself."—"Certainly. Is that all?"—"Wait a moment! I reserve to myself the right of purchasing the post from you at one hundred and fifty thousand livres' profit for yourself, if in your mode of filling the office you do not follow out a line of conduct in conformity with the interests of the king

and with my projects."—"Ah! ah!" said Vanel, in a slightly altered tone.

"Is there anything in that which can possibly be objectionable to you, M. Vanel?" said Colbert, coldly.—"Oh, no, no!" replied Vanel, quickly.

"Very good. We will sign an agreement to that effect whenever you like. And now go as quickly as you can to M. Fouquet's friends, and obtain an interview with the superintendent. Do not be too difficult in making whatever concessions may be required of you; and when once the arrangements are all made—"—"I will press him to sign."—"Be most careful to do nothing of the kind; do not speak of signatures with M. Fouquet, nor of deeds, nor even ask him to pass his word. Understand this, otherwise you will lose everything. All you have to do is to get M. Fouquet to give you his hand on the matter. Go, go!"

CHAPTER CLXXXII

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE QUEEN-MOTHER

THE queen-mother was in her bedroom at the Palais-Royal with Madame de Motteville and the Señora Molina. The king, who had been impatiently expected the whole day, had not made his appearance; and the queen, who had grown quite impatient, had often sent to inquire about him. The whole atmosphere of the court seemed to indicate an approaching storm; the courtiers and the ladies of the court avoided meeting in the antechambers and the corridors, in order not to converse on compromising subjects.

Monsieur had joined the king early in the morning for a hunting-party; Madame remained in her own apartments, cool and distant to every one; and the queen-mother, after she had said her prayers in Latin, talked of domestic matters with her two friends in pure Castilian. Madame de Motteville, who understood the language perfectly, answered her in French. When the three ladies had exhausted every form of dissimulation and politeness to reach at last the charge that the king's conduct was causing grief to the queen and the queen-mother and all his family, and when in guarded phrases they had fulminated every variety of imprecation against Mademoiselle de la Vallière, the queen-mother terminated these recriminations by an exclamation

indicative of her own reflections and character. "*Estos hijos!*" said she to Molina (which means, "These children!"—words full of meaning on a mother's lips,—words full of terrible significance in the mouth of a queen who, like Anne of Austria, hid many curious and dark secrets in her soul). "Yes," said Molina, "these children! for whom every mother becomes a sacrifice."

"To whom," replied the queen, "a mother has sacrificed everything." Anne did not finish her phrase; for she fancied, when she raised her eyes towards the full-length portrait of the pale Louis XIII., that light had once more flashed from her husband's dull eyes, and that his nostrils were inflated by wrath. The portrait became a living being; it did not speak, it threatened.

A profound silence succeeded the queen's last remark. La Molina began to turn over the ribbons and lace of a large work-table. Madame de Motteville, surprised at the look of mutual intelligence which had been exchanged between the confidante and her mistress, cast down her eyes like a discreet woman, and pretending to be observant of nothing that was passing listened with the utmost attention. She heard nothing, however, but a very significant "Hum!" on the part of the Spanish duenna, who was the image of circumspection, and a profound sign on the part of the queen. She looked up immediately. "You are suffering?" she said.—"No, Motteville, no; why do you say that?"—"Your Majesty almost groaned just now."—"You are right; I do suffer a little."

"M. Vallot is not far off; I believe he is in Madame's apartment."—"Why is he with Madame?"—"Madame is troubled with nervous attacks."—"A very fine disorder, indeed!" said the queen. "M. Vallot is wrong in being there, when another physician might cure Madame." Madame de Motteville looked up with an air of great surprise, as she replied, "Another doctor instead of M. Vallot! Who, then?"

"Occupation, Motteville, occupation! Ah! if any one is really ill, it is my poor daughter."—"And your Majesty too."—"Less so this evening, though."—"Do not believe that too confidently, Madame," said De Motteville.

As if to justify the caution, a sharp pain seized the queen, who turned deadly pale, and threw herself back in the chair, with every symptom of a sudden fainting-fit. "My drops!" she murmured.—"Ah! ah!" replied Molina, who went without haste to a richly gilded tortoise-shell cabinet, from which she took a large rock-crystal smelling-bottle, and brought it, open,

to the queen, who inhaled from it wildly several times, and murmured, "In that way the Lord will kill me; his holy will be done!"—"Your Majesty's death is not so near at hand," added Molina, replacing the smelling-bottle in the cabinet.

"Does your Majesty feel better now?" inquired Madame de Motteville.—"Much better," returned the queen, placing her finger on her lips, to impose silence on her favourite.

"It is very strange," remarked Madame de Motteville, after a pause.—"What is strange?" said the queen.—"Does your Majesty remember the day when this pain attacked you for the first time?"—"I remember only that it was a grievously sad day for me, Motteville."—"But your Majesty had not always regarded that day as a sad one."—"Why?"—"Because twenty-three years before, on that very day, his present Majesty, your own glorious son, was born at the very same hour."

The queen uttered a loud cry, buried her face in her hands, and seemed utterly lost for some moments. Was it remembrance or reflection, or was it grief? La Molina darted a look at Madame de Motteville almost furious in its reproachfulness. The poor woman, ignorant of its meaning, was about to make inquiries in her own defence, when suddenly Anne of Austria arose and said: "Yes, the 5th of September; my sorrow began on the 5th of September. The greatest joy, one day; the deepest sorrow, the next,—the sorrow," she added in a low voice, "the bitter expiation of a too excessive joy." And from that moment Anne of Austria, whose memory and reason seemed to have become entirely suspended for a time, remained impenetrable, with vacant look, mind almost wandering, and hands hanging heavily down, as if life had almost departed.

"We must put her to bed," said La Molina.—"Presently, Molina."—"Let us leave the queen alone," added the Spanish attendant.

Madame de Motteville rose. Large and glistening tears were fast rolling down the queen's pallid face; and Molina, having observed this sign of weakness, fixed her vigilant black eyes upon her. "Yes, yes," replied the queen. "Leave us, Motteville; go!" The word "us" produced a disagreeable effect upon the ears of the French favourite; for it signified that an interchange of secrets or of revelations of the past was about to be made, and that one person was *de trop* in the conversation which seemed likely to take place. "Will Molina be sufficient for your Majesty to-night?" inquired the Frenchwoman.—"Yes," replied the queen.

Digitized by Google

Madame de Motteville bowed in submission, and was about to withdraw, when suddenly an old female attendant, dressed as if she had belonged to the Spanish court of the year 1620, opened the door and surprised the queen in her tears, Madame de Motteville in her skilful retreat, and Molina in her strategy. "The remedy!" she cried delightedly to the queen, as she unceremoniously approached the group.—"What remedy, *Chica?*" said Anne of Austria.—"For your Majesty's sufferings," the former replied.

"Who brings it?" asked Madame de Motteville, eagerly,—"M. Vallot?"—"No; a lady from Flanders."—"From Flanders? Is she Spanish?" inquired the queen.—"I don't know."

"Who sent her?"—"M. Colbert."—"Her name?"—"She did not mention it."—"Her position in life?"—"She will answer that herself."—"Her face?"—"She is masked."—"Go, Molina; go and see!" cried the queen.—"It is needless," suddenly replied a voice, at once firm and gentle in its tone, which proceeded from the other side of the tapestry hangings,—a voice which startled the attendants and made the queen tremble. At the same moment a woman, masked, appeared between the curtains, and before the queen could speak added, "I am connected with the order of the Béguines of Bruges, and do indeed bring with me the remedy which is certain to effect a cure of your Majesty's complaint."

No one uttered a sound, and the Béguine did not move a step. "Speak!" said the queen.—"I will when we are alone," was the answer.

Anne of Austria looked at her attendants, who immediately withdrew. The Béguine thereupon advanced a few steps towards the queen, and bowed reverently before her. The queen gazed with increasing mistrust at this woman, who in her turn fixed a pair of brilliant eyes upon the queen through openings in the mask. "The Queen of France must indeed be very ill," said Anne of Austria, "if it is known at the Béguinage of Bruges that she stands in need of being cured."—"Your Majesty, thank God, is not ill beyond remedy."

"But, tell me, how do you happen to know that I am suffering?"—"Your Majesty has friends in Flanders."—"And these friends have sent you?"—"Yes, Madame."—"Name them to me."—"Impossible, Madame, since your Majesty's memory has not been awakened by your heart."

Anne of Austria looked up, endeavouring to discover through

Google

the concealment of the mask and through her mysterious language the name of this person who expressed herself with such familiarity and freedom; then suddenly, wearied by a curiosity at odds with her pride, she said, "You are ignorant, perhaps, that royal personages are never spoken to with the face masked."

"Deign to excuse me, Madame," replied the Béguine, humbly. —"I cannot excuse you; I will not forgive you if you do not throw your mask aside."—"I have made a vow, Madame, to go to the help of those who are afflicted or suffering, without ever permitting them to behold my face. I might have been able to administer some relief to your body and to your mind; but since your Majesty forbids me, I will take my leave. Adieu, Madame, adieu!"

These words were uttered with a harmony of tone and respect of manner that destroyed the queen's anger and suspicion, but did not remove her feeling of curiosity. "You are right," she said; "it ill becomes those who are suffering to reject the means of relief which Heaven sends them. Speak, then; and may you indeed be able, as you assert you are, to administer relief to my body. Alas! I think that God is about to make it suffer."

"Let us first speak a little of the mind, if you please," said the Béguine,—"of the mind, which I am sure must also suffer." —"My mind?"—"There are cancers so insidious in their nature that their very pulsation is invisible. Such cancers, Madame, leave the ivory whiteness of the skin untouched, and marble not the firm, fair flesh with their blue tints; the physician who bends over the patient's chest hears not, though he listens, the insatiable teeth of the disease grinding its onward progress through the muscles, as the blood flows freely on; neither iron nor fire has ever destroyed or disarmed the rage of these mortal scourges; their home is in the mind, which they corrupt; they grow in the heart until it breaks. Such, Madame, are these other cancers, fatal to queens: are you free from these evils?"

Anne slowly raised her arm, as dazzling in its perfect whiteness and as pure in its rounded outlines as it was in the time of her earlier days. "The evils to which you allude," she said, "are the condition of the lives of the high in rank upon earth, to whom Heaven has imparted mind. When those evils become too heavy to be borne, the Lord lightens their burden by penitence and confession. Thus we lay down our burden, and the secrets which oppress us. But forget not that the same sovereign Lord apportions their trials to the strength of his creatures;

Digitized by Google

and my strength is not inferior to my burden. For the secrets of others I have enough of the mercy of Heaven; for my own secrets not so much mercy as my confessor."

"I find you, Madame, as courageous as ever against your enemies; I do not find you showing confidence in your friends."—"Queens have no friends. If you have nothing further to say to me, if you feel yourself inspired by Heaven as a prophetess, leave me, I pray; for I dread the future."—"I should have supposed," said the Béguine, resolutely, "that you would rather dread the past."

Hardly had these words escaped the Béguine's lips, when the queen rose proudly. "Speak!" she cried, in a short, imperious tone of voice; "explain yourself briefly, quickly, entirely; or, if not—"—"Nay, do not threaten me, your Majesty!" said the Béguine, gently. "I have come to you full of compassion and respect; I have come on the part of a friend."—"Prove it, then! Comfort, instead of irritating me."

"Easily enough; and your Majesty will see who is friendly to you. What misfortune has happened to your Majesty during these twenty-three years past?"—"Serious misfortunes, indeed! Have I not lost the king?"—"I speak not of misfortunes of that kind. I wish to ask you if, since—the birth of the king,—any indiscretion on a friend's part has caused your Majesty distress?"—"I do not understand you," replied the queen, setting her teeth hard together in order to conceal her emotion.

"I will make myself understood, then. Your Majesty remembers that the king was born on the 5th of September, 1638, at quarter-past eleven o'clock."—"Yes," stammered the queen.—"At half-past twelve," continued the Béguine, "the dauphin, who had been baptized by Monseigneur de Meaux in the king's and in your own presence, was acknowledged as the heir of the crown of France. The king then went to the chapel of the old Château de St. Germain to hear the *Te Deum* chanted."—"Quite true, quite true," murmured the queen.

"Your Majesty's confinement took place in the presence of Monsieur, his Majesty's late uncle, of the princes, and of the ladies attached to the court. The king's physician, Bouvard, and Honoré, the surgeon, were stationed in the antechamber; your Majesty slept from three o'clock until seven, I believe?"—"Yes, yes; but you tell me no more than every one else knows as well as you and myself."—"I am now, Madame, approaching that with which very few persons are acquainted. Very few persons, did I say? Alas! I might say two only;

Digitized by Google

for formerly there were but five in all, and for many years past the secret has been assured by the deaths of the principal participators in it. The late king sleeps now with his ancestors; Péronne, the midwife, soon followed him; Laporte is already forgotten." The queen opened her lips as though about to reply; she felt beneath her icy hand, with which she touched her face, the beads of perspiration upon her brow.

"It was eight o'clock," pursued the Béguine. "The king was seated at supper, full of joy and happiness; around him on all sides arose wild cries of delight and drinking of healths; the people cheered beneath the balconies; the Swiss Guards, the musketeers, and the royal guards wandered through the city, borne about in triumph by the drunken students. Those boisterous sounds of the general joy disturbed the dauphin, the future king of France, who was quietly lying in the arms of Madame de Hausac, his nurse, and whose eyes, when he should open them, might have observed two crowns at the foot of his cradle. Suddenly your Majesty uttered a piercing cry, and Dame Péronne immediately flew to your bedside. The doctors were dining in a room at some distance from your chamber; the palace, abandoned in the general confusion, was without either sentinels or guards. The midwife, having questioned and examined your Majesty, gave a sudden exclamation of surprise, and taking you in her arms, bewildered, almost out of her senses from sheer distress of mind, despatched Laporte to inform the king that her Majesty the Queen wished to see him in her room.

"Laporte, you are aware, Madame, was a man of the most admirable calmness and presence of mind. He did not approach the king as if he were the bearer of alarming intelligence and feeling his importance wished to inspire the terror which he himself experienced; besides, it was not a very terrifying intelligence which awaited the king. At any rate, Laporte, with a smile upon his lips, approached the king's chair, saying to him, 'Sire, the queen is very happy, and would be still more so to see your Majesty.' On that day Louis XIII. would have given his crown away to the veriest beggar for a 'God bless you.' Animated, light-hearted, and full of gaiety, the king rose from the table, and said to those around him, in a tone that Henry IV. might have used, 'Gentlemen, I am going to see my wife.' He came to your bedside, Madame, at the very moment when Dame Péronne presented to him a second prince, as beautiful and healthy as the former, and said, 'Sire, Heaven will not

Digitized by Google

allow the kingdom of France to fall into the female line.' The king, yielding to a first impulse, clasped the child in his arms, and cried, 'Oh, Heaven, I thank thee!'"

At this part of her recital the Béguine paused, observing how intensely the queen was suffering. She had thrown herself back in her chair, and with her head bent forward and her eyes fixed, listened without seeming to hear, and her lips moved convulsively, breathing either a prayer to Heaven or imprecations against the woman before her. "Ah! do not believe that if there has been but one dauphin in France," exclaimed the Béguine, "if the queen allowed the second child to vegetate far from the throne,—do not believe that she was an unfeeling mother. Oh, no, no! There are those who know the floods of bitter tears she shed; there are those who have known and witnessed the passionate kisses she imprinted on that innocent creature in exchange for the life of misery and gloom to which State policy condemned the twin brother of Louis XIV."—"Oh, Heaven!" murmured the queen, feebly.

"It is known," continued the Béguine, quickly, "that when the king perceived the effect which would result from the existence of two sons, both equal in age and pretensions, he trembled for the welfare of France, for the tranquillity of the State. It is known that the Cardinal de Richelieu, by the direction of Louis XIII., thought over the subject with deep attention, and after an hour's meditation in his Majesty's cabinet pronounced the following sentence: 'A king is born, to succeed his Majesty. God has sent another, to succeed the first; but at present we need only the first-born. Let us conceal the second from France, as God has concealed him from his parents themselves. One prince is peace and safety for the State; two competitors are civil war and anarchy.'"

The queen rose suddenly from her seat, pale as death, her hands clinched together. "You know too much," she said in a hoarse, thick voice, "since you refer to secrets of State. As for the friends from whom you have acquired this secret, they are false and treacherous. You are their accomplice in the crime which is now committed. Now, throw aside your mask, or I will have you arrested by my captain of the guards. Do not think that this secret terrifies me! You have obtained it; you shall restore it to me. It will freeze in your bosom; neither your secret nor your life belongs to you from this moment." Anne of Austria, joining gesture to the threat, advanced two steps towards the Béguine. "Learn," said the latter, "to

Digitized by Google

know and value the fidelity, the honour, and the secrecy of the friends you have abandoned." She then suddenly threw aside her mask.

"Madame de Chevreuse!" exclaimed the queen.—"With your Majesty, the sole living confidante of the secret."—"Ah," murmured Anne of Austria, "come and embrace me, Duchess! Alas! you kill your friend in thus trifling with her terrible distress." The queen, leaning her head upon the shoulder of the old duchess, burst into a flood of bitter tears. "How young you are still!" said the latter, in a hollow voice; "you can weep!"

CHAPTER CLXXXIII

TWO FRIENDS

THE queen looked steadily at Madame de Chevreuse, and said: "I believe you just now made use of the word 'happy' in speaking of me. Hitherto, Duchess, I had thought it impossible that a human creature could anywhere be found less happy than the Queen of France."—"Your afflictions, Madame, have indeed been terrible enough; but by the side of those illustrious misfortunes to which we, two old friends separated by men's malice, were just now alluding, you possess sources of pleasure, slight enough in themselves it may be, but which are greatly envied by the world."—"What are they?" said Anne of Austria, bitterly. "How can you use the word 'pleasure,' Duchess,—you who just now admitted that my body and my mind both are in need of remedies?"

Madame de Chevreuse collected herself for a moment, and then murmured, "How far removed kings are from other people!"—"What do you mean?"—"I mean that they are so far removed from the vulgar herd that they forget that others ever stand in need of the bare necessaries of life. They are like the inhabitant of the African mountain who gazing from the verdant table-land, refreshed by the rills of melted snow, cannot comprehend that the dwellers in the plains below him are perishing from hunger and thirst in the midst of their lands burned up by the heat of the sun."

The queen slightly coloured, for she now began to perceive the drift of her friend's remark. "It was very wrong," she said, "to have neglected you."—"Oh, Madame, the king has inherited, it is said, the hatred his father bore me. The king

Digitized by Google

would dismiss me if he knew I were in the Palais-Royal."—" I cannot say that the king is very well disposed towards you, Duchess," replied the queen; " but I could—secretly, you know—" The duchess's disdainful smile produced a feeling of uneasiness in the queen's mind. " Duchess," she hastened to add, " you did perfectly right to come here."—" Thanks, Madame."—" Even were it only to give us the happiness of contradicting the report of your death."

" Has it been said, then, that I was dead? "—" Everywhere." —" And yet my children did not go into mourning."—" Ah! you know, Duchess, the court is very frequently moving about from place to place; we see the gentlemen of Albert de Luynes but seldom, and many things escape our minds in the midst of the preoccupations which constantly engage us."

" Your Majesty ought not to have believed the report of my death."—" Why not? Alas! we are all mortal; and you may perceive how rapidly I—your younger sister, as we used formerly to say—am approaching the tomb."—" If your Majesty had believed me dead, you ought to have been astonished not to have received any communication from me."—" Death not unfrequently takes us by surprise, Duchess." — " Oh, your Majesty, those who are burdened with secrets such as we have just now discussed have always an urgent desire to divulge them, which they must gratify before they die. Among the preparations for eternity is the task of putting one's papers in order." The queen started. " Your Majesty will be sure to learn in a particular manner the day of my death."—" Why so? "—" Because your Majesty will receive the next day, under several coverings, everything connected with our mysterious correspondence of former times."—" Did you not burn it? " cried Anne, in alarm.—" Traitors only," replied the duchess, " destroy a royal correspondence."

" Traitors, do you say? "—" Yes, certainly; or rather they pretend to destroy, and keep or sell it. The faithful, on the contrary, most carefully secrete such treasures; for it may happen that some day or other they will wish to seek out their queen in order to say to her: ' Madame, I am getting old; my health is fast failing me. For me there is danger of death; for your Majesty, the danger that this secret may be revealed. Take, therefore, this dangerous paper, and burn it yourself.' "—" A dangerous paper? What one? "—" So far as I am concerned, I have but one, it is true; but that is indeed most dangerous in its nature."

Digitized by Google

"Oh, Duchess, tell me, tell me!"—"A letter dated Tuesday, the 2nd of August, 1644, in which you beg me to go to Noisy-le-Sec to see that unhappy child. In your own handwriting, Madame, there are those words, 'that unhappy child!'"

A profound silence ensued. The queen's mind was wandering in the past; Madame de Chevreuse was watching the progress of her scheme. "Yes, unhappy, most unhappy!" murmured Anne of Austria; "how sad the existence he led, poor child, to finish it in so cruel a manner!"—"Is he dead?" cried the duchess, suddenly, with a curiosity whose sincere accents the queen instinctively detected.—"He died of consumption, died forgotten, died withered and blighted like the flowers a lover has given to his mistress, which she leaves to die secreted in a drawer where she has hidden them from the world."

"Died?" repeated the duchess, with an air of discouragement which would have afforded the queen the most unfeigned delight had it not been tempered in some measure by a mixture of doubt. "Died—at Noisy-le-Sec?"—"Yes, in the arms of his tutor,—a poor, honest man who did not long survive him."—"That can be easily understood. It is so difficult to bear up under the weight of such a loss and such a secret," said Madame de Chevreuse, the irony of which reflection the queen pretended not to perceive. Madame de Chevreuse continued: "Well, Madame, I inquired some years ago at Noisy-le-Sec about this unhappy child. I was told that it was not believed he was dead; and that was my reason for not at once condoling with your Majesty. Oh, certainly, if I had believed it, never should the slightest allusion to so deplorable an event have reawakened your Majesty's legitimate distress."

"You say that it is not believed that the child died at Noisy?"—"No, Madame."—"What did they say about him, then?"—"They said— But no doubt they were mistaken."—"Nay, speak, speak!"

"They said that one evening about the year 1645 a lady, beautiful and majestic in her bearing, which was observed notwithstanding the mask and the mantle which concealed her figure,—a lady of rank, of very high rank no doubt,—came in a carriage to the place where the road branches off,—the very same spot, you know, where I awaited news of the young prince when your Majesty was graciously pleased to send me there."—"Well, well?"—"That the boy's tutor, or guardian, took the child to this lady."—"Well, what next?"—"That both the child and his tutor left that part of the country the very next day."

Digitized by Google

"There! you see there is some truth in what you relate, since in point of fact the poor child died from a sudden attack of illness, which up to the age of seven years makes the lives of all children, as doctors say, suspended as it were by a thread."—"What your Majesty says is quite true. No one knows it better than you; no one believes it more than myself. But yet how strange it is—"—"What can it now be?" thought the queen.

"The person who gave me these details, who had been sent to inquire after the child's health—"—"Did you confide such a charge to any one else? Oh, Duchess!"—"Some one as dumb as your Majesty, as dumb as myself; we will suppose it was myself, Madame. This 'some one,' some months after, passing through Touraine—"—"Touraine!"—"Recognised both the tutor and the child too! I am wrong; he thought he recognised them, both living, cheerful, happy, and flourishing,—the one in a green old age, the other in the flower of his youth. Judge, after that, what truth can be attributed to the rumours which are circulated, or what faith, after that, can be placed in anything that may happen in the world. But I am fatiguing your Majesty; it was not my intention, however, to do so; and I will take my leave of you, after renewing to you the assurance of my most respectful devotion."

"Stay, Duchess! Let us first talk a little about yourself."—"Of myself, Madame? I am not worthy that you should bend your looks upon me."—"Why not, indeed? Are you not the oldest friend I have? Are you angry with me, Duchess?"—"I, indeed! What motive could I have? If I had reason to be angry with your Majesty, should I have come here?"

"Duchess, age is fast creeping on us both; we should be united against that death whose approach cannot be far off."—"You overpower me, Madame, with the kindness of your language."—"No one has ever loved or served me as you have done, Duchess."—"Your Majesty remembers it?"—"Always. Duchess, give me a proof of your friendship."—"Ah, Madame, my whole being is devoted to your Majesty."

"The proof I require is that you should ask something of me."—"Ask—"—"Oh, I know you well,—no one is more disinterested, more noble, more truly royal."—"Do not praise me too highly, Madame," said the duchess, becoming uneasy.

"I could never praise you as much as you deserve to be praised."—"And yet, age and misfortune effect a great change in people, Madame."—"So much the better; for the beautiful, the haughty, the adored duchess of former days might have

answered me ungratefully, 'I do not wish for anything from you.' Blessed be misfortunes, if they have come to you, since they will have changed you, and you will now perhaps answer me, 'I accept.'"

The duchess's look and smile became more gentle; she was under the charm, and no longer concealed her wishes. "Speak, dearest!" said the queen; "what do you want?"—"I must first explain to you—"—"Do so unhesitatingly."—"Well, then, your Majesty can confer on me a pleasure unspeakable, a pleasure incomparable."—"What is it?" said the queen, a little distant in her manner, from an uneasiness of feeling produced by this remark. "But do not forget, my good Chevreuse, that I am quite as much under my son's influence as I was formerly under my husband's."

"I will not be too hard, Madame."—"Call me as you used to do; it will be a sweet echo of our happy youth."—"Well, then, my dear mistress, my darling Anne—"—"Do you know Spanish still?"—"Yes."—"Ask me in Spanish, then."—"Here it is: Will your Majesty do me the honour to pass a few days with me at Dampierre?"—"Is that all?" said the queen, stupefied.—"Yes."

"Nothing more than that?"—"Good heavens! Can you possibly imagine that in asking you that, I am not asking you the greatest conceivable favour? If that really be the case, you do not know me. Will you accept?"—"Yes, gladly. And I shall be happy," continued the queen, with some suspicion, "if my presence can in any way be useful to you."—"Useful," exclaimed the duchess, laughing,—"oh, no, no! agreeable, delicious, delightful,—yes, a thousand times yes! You promise me, then?"—"I swear it," said the queen, whereupon the duchess seized her beautiful hand and covered it with kisses. The queen could not help murmuring to herself, "She is a good-hearted woman, and very generous too."

"Will your Majesty consent to wait a fortnight before you come?"—"Certainly; but why?"—"Because," said the duchess, "knowing me to be in disgrace, no one would lend me the hundred thousand crowns which I require to put Dampierre in a state of repair. But when it is known that I require that sum for the purpose of receiving your Majesty at Dampierre properly, all the money in Paris will be at my disposal."

"Ah!" said the queen, gently nodding her head with an air of intelligence, "a hundred thousand crowns! you want a hundred thousand crowns to put Dampierre into repair?"—

Digitized by Google

"Quite as much as that."—"And no one will lend them to you?"—"No one."—"I will lend them to you, if you like, Duchess."—"Oh, I hardly dare accept such a sum!"—"You would be wrong if you did not. Besides, a hundred thousand crowns is really not much. I know but too well that your discreetness has never been properly acknowledged. Push that table a little towards me, Duchess, and I will write you an order on M. Colbert,—no, on M. Fouquet, who is a far more courteous and obliging man."

"Will he pay it?"—"If he will not pay it, I will; but it will be the first time he will have refused me." The queen wrote and handed the duchess the order, and afterwards dismissed her with a warm and cheerful embrace.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV

HOW JEAN DE LA FONTAINE WROTE HIS FIRST TALE

ALL these intrigues are exhausted; the human mind, so complicated in its exhibitions, has developed itself freely in the three outlines which our recital has afforded. It is not unlikely that in the future we are now preparing, politics and intrigues may still appear; but the springs by which they work will be so carefully concealed that no one will be able to see aught but flowers and paintings,—just as at a theatre, where a Colossus appears upon the scene walking along moved by the small legs and slender arms of a child concealed within the framework. We now return to St. Mandé, where the superintendent was in the habit of receiving his select society of epicureans. For some time past the host had been severely tried. Every one in the house was aware of and felt the minister's distress. No more magnificent and recklessly improvident *réunions!* Finance had been the pretext assigned by Fouquet; and never was any pretext, as Gourville wittily said, more fallacious, for there was not the slightest appearance of money.

M. Vatel was most resolutely painstaking in keeping up the reputation of the house, and yet the gardeners who supplied the kitchens complained of a ruinous delay. The agents for the supply of Spanish wines frequently sent drafts which no one honoured; fishermen, whom the superintendent engaged on the coast of Normandy, calculated that if they were paid all that

Digitized by Google

was due to them, the amount would enable them to retire comfortably for the rest of their lives; fish, which at a later period was to be the cause of Vatel's death, did not arrive at all. However, on the ordinary day of reception, Fouquet's friends flocked in more numerously than ever. Gourville and the Abbé Fouquet talked over money matters,—that is to say, the abbé borrowed a few pistoles from Gourville. Pellisson, seated with his legs crossed, was engaged in finishing the peroration of a speech with which Fouquet was to open the parliament; and this speech was a masterpiece, because Pellisson wrote it for his friend,—that is to say, he inserted everything in it which the latter would most certainly never have taken the trouble to say of his own accord. Presently Loret and La Fontaine would enter from the garden, engaged in a dispute upon the facility of making verses. The painters and musicians, in their turn, also were hovering near the dining-room. As soon as eight o'clock struck, the supper would be announced; for the superintendent never kept any one waiting. It was already half-past seven and the guests were in good appetite.

As soon as all the guests were assembled, Gourville went straight up to Pellisson, awoke him out of his reverie, and led him into the middle of a room the doors of which he had closed. "Well," he said, "anything new?" Pellisson raised his intelligent and gentle face, and said, "I have borrowed twenty-five thousand livres of my aunt, and I have them here in good money." —"Good!" replied Gourville; "we want only one hundred and ninety-five thousand livres for the first payment."—"The payment of what?" asked La Fontaine.

"What! absent-minded as usual? Why, it was you who told us that the small estate at Corbeil was going to be sold by one of M. Fouquet's creditors; and you, also, who proposed that all his friends should subscribe. More than that, too, it was you who said that you would sell a corner of your house at Château-Thierry in order to furnish your own proportion; and you now come and ask, '*The payment of what*'?"

This remark was received with a general laugh, which made La Fontaine blush. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I had not forgotten it,—oh, no! only—"—"Only you remembered nothing about it," replied Loret.—"That is the truth; and the fact is, he is quite right. There is a great difference between forgetting and not remembering."

"Well, then," added Pellisson, "you bring your mite in the shape of the price of the piece of land you have sold?"—"Sold?

Digitized by Google

no!"—"And have you not sold the field, then?" inquired Gourville, in astonishment, for he knew the poet's disinterestedness.—"My wife would not let me," replied the latter, at which there were fresh bursts of laughter.

"And yet you went to Château-Thierry for that purpose," said some one.—"Certainly I did, and on horseback."—"Poor fellow!"—"I had eight different horses, and I was almost jolted to death."—"You are an excellent fellow! And you rested yourself when you arrived there!"

"Rested! Oh! of course I did, for I had an immense deal of work to do."—"How so?"—"My wife had been flirting with the man to whom I wished to sell the land. The fellow drew back from his bargain, and so I challenged him."—"Very good; and you fought?"—"It seems not."—"You know nothing about it, I suppose?"—"No; my wife and her relations interfered in the matter. I was kept a quarter of an hour with my sword in my hand; but I was not wounded."—"And the adversary?"—"Neither was the adversary, for he never came on to the field."

"Capital!" cried his friends, from all sides; "you must have been terribly angry."—"Exceedingly so; I had caught cold. I returned home, and then my wife began to quarrel with me."—"In real earnest?"—"Yes, in real earnest; she threw a loaf of bread at my head, a large loaf."—"And what did you do?"—"Oh! I upset the table over her and her guests; and then I got upon my horse again, and here I am."

Every one had great difficulty in keeping his countenance at the relation of this tragic comedy; and when the laughter had somewhat ceased, one of the guests present said to him, "Is that all you have brought us back?"—"Oh, no! I have an excellent idea in my head."—"What is it?"—"Have you noticed that there is a good deal of sportive, jesting poetry written in France?"—"Yes, of course," replied every one.—"And," pursued La Fontaine, "only a very small portion of it is printed."—"The laws are strict, you know."

"That may be; but a rare article is a dear article, and that is the reason why I have written a small poem extremely licentious."—"Oh, oh, dear poet!"—"Extremely obscene."—"Oh! oh!"—"Extremely cynical."—"Oh, the devil!"—"Yes," continued the poet, with cold indifference; "I have introduced in it the greatest freedom of language I could possibly employ."

Peals of laughter again broke forth, while the poet was thus announcing the quality of his wares. "And," he continued,

Digitized by Google

"I have tried to exceed everything that Boccaccio, Arétin, and other masters of their craft have written in the same style."—"Good God!" cried Pellisson, "it will be condemned!"—"Do you think so?" said La Fontaine, simply. "I assure you, I did not do it on my own account so much as on M. Fouquet's."

This wonderful conclusion raised the mirth of all present to a climax. "And I have sold the first edition of this little book for eight hundred livres," exclaimed La Fontaine, rubbing his hands together. "Serious and religious books sell at about half that rate."—"It would have been better," said Gourville, laughing; "to have written two religious books instead!"—"It would have been too long, and not amusing enough," replied La Fontaine, tranquilly. "My eight hundred livres are in this little bag; I offer them as my contribution."

As he said this, he placed his offering in the hands of their treasurer. It was then Loret's turn, who gave a hundred and fifty livres. The others stripped themselves in the same way; and the total sum in the purse amounted to forty thousand livres. Never did more generous coins rattle in the divine balances in which charity weighs good hearts and good intentions against the counterfeit coin of devout hypocrites.

The money was still being counted over when the superintendent noiselessly entered the room. He had heard everything. This man, who had possessed so many millions, who had exhausted all pleasures and all honours,—this generous heart, this inexhaustible brain,—Fouquet, who had, like two burning crucibles, devoured the material and moral substance of the first kingdom in the world, crossed the threshold with his eyes filled with tears, and passed his white and slender fingers through the gold and silver. "Poor offering," he said, in a tone tender and filled with emotion, "you will disappear in the smallest corner of my empty purse; but you have filled to overflowing that which nothing can ever exhaust,—my heart. Thank you, my friends,—thank you!" And as he could not embrace every one present,—all were weeping a little, philosophers though they were,—he embraced La Fontaine, saying to him, "Poor fellow! so you have on my account been beaten by your wife and damned by your confessor?"—"Oh, it is a mere nothing!" replied the poet. "If your creditors will only wait a couple of years, I shall have written a hundred other tales, which at two editions each will pay off the debt."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CLXXXV

LA FONTAINE AS A NEGOTIATOR

FOUQUET pressed La Fontaine's hand most warmly, saying to him, "My dear poet, write a hundred other tales, not only for the eighty pistoles which each of them will produce you, but still more to enrich our language with a hundred other masterpieces."

"Oh! oh!" said La Fontaine, with a little air of pride, "you must not suppose that I have brought only this idea and the eighty pistoles to the superintendent."—"Oh! indeed!" was the general acclamation from all parts of the room; "M. de la Fontaine is in funds to-day."—"Heaven bless the idea, if it brings me one or two millions," said Fouquet, gaily.—"Exactly," replied La Fontaine.—"Quick, quick!" cried the assembly.

"Take care!" said Pellisson in La Fontaine's ear. "You have had a most brilliant success up to the present moment; do not go too far."—"Not at all, M. Pellisson; and you, who are a man of taste, will be the first to approve of what I have done."—"Is it a matter of millions?" said Gourville.—"I have fifteen hundred thousand livres here, M. Gourville," he replied, striking himself on the chest.—"The deuce take this Gascon from Château-Thierry!" cried Loret.

"It is not the pocket you should touch, but the brain," said Fouquet.—"Stay a moment, Monsieur the Superintendent!" added La Fontaine; "you are not procureur-général,—you are a poet."—"True, true!" cried Loret, Conrart, and every person present connected with literature.—"You are, I repeat, a poet and a painter, a sculptor, a friend of the arts and sciences; but acknowledge that you are no lawyer."—"Oh, I do acknowledge it!" replied M. Fouquet, smiling.

"If you were to be nominated at the Academy, you would refuse, I think."—"I think I should, with all due deference to the academicians."—"Very good; if therefore you do not wish to belong to the Academy, why do you allow yourself to form one of the parliament?"—"Oh! oh!" said Pellisson; "we are talking politics."

"I wish to know," persisted La Fontaine, "whether the barrister's gown does or does not become M. Fouquet."—"There is no question of the gown at all," retorted Pellisson,

Digitized by Google

annoyed at the laughter of the company.—"On the contrary, the gown is in question," said Loret.—"Take the gown away from the procureur-général," said Conrart, "and we have M. Fouquet left us still, of whom we have no reason to complain; but as he is no procureur-général without his gown, we agree with M. de la Fontaine, and pronounce the gown to be nothing but a bugbear."

"*Fugiunt risus leporesque*," said Loret.—"The smiles and the graces," said some one present.—"That is not the way," said Pellisson, gravely, "that I translate *lepores*."—"How do you translate it?" said La Fontaine.—"Thus: 'The hares run away as soon as they see M. Fouquet.'"

A burst of laughter, in which the superintendent joined, followed this sally. "But why hares?" objected Conrart, vexed.—"Because the hare will be the very one who will not be over-pleased to see M. Fouquet retaining the elements of strength which belong to his parliamentary position."—"Oh! oh!" murmured the poets.

"*Quo non ascendam*," said Conrart, "would seem to me impossible with a procureur's gown."

"And it seems so to me without that gown," said the obstinate Pellisson. "What is your opinion, Gourville?"—"I think the gown in question is a very good thing," replied the latter; "but I equally think that a million and a half is far better than the gown."—"And I am of Gourville's opinion," exclaimed Fouquet, stopping the discussion by the expression of his own opinion, which would necessarily bear down all the others.

"A million and a half!" Pellisson grumbled out. "Now I happen to know an Indian fable—"—"Tell it to me," said La Fontaine; "I ought to know it too."—"Tell it, tell it!" said the others.

"There was a tortoise which was as usual well protected by its shell," said Pellisson. "Whenever its enemies threatened it, it took refuge within its covering. One day some one said to it, 'You must feel very hot in such a house as that in the summer, and you are altogether prevented from showing off your graces; here is a snake who will give you a million and a half for your shell.'—"Good!" said the superintendent, laughing.—"Well, what next?" said La Fontaine, much more interested in the apologue than in its moral.—"The tortoise sold his shell, and remained naked and defenceless. A vulture happened to see him, and being hungry broke the tortoise's back with a blow of

Digitized by Google

his beak and devoured it. The moral is that M. Fouquet should take very good care to keep his gown."

La Fontaine understood the moral seriously. "You forget Æschylus," he said to his adversary.—"What do you mean?"—"Æschylus was bald-headed; and a vulture—your vulture probably—who was a great lover of tortoises mistook at a distance his head for a block of stone, and let a tortoise which was shrunk up in his shell fall upon it."

"Yes, yes, La Fontaine is right," resumed Fouquet, who had become very thoughtful. "Whenever a vulture wishes to devour a tortoise, he well knows how to break his shell; and but too happy is that tortoise to which a snake pays a million and a half for his envelope. If any one were to bring me a generous-hearted snake like the one in your fable, Pellisson, I would give him my shell."—"*Rara avis in terris!*" cried Conrart.—"And like a black swan, is he not?" added La Fontaine; "well, then, the bird in question, black and very rare, is already found."

"Do you mean to say that you have found a purchaser for my post of procureur-général?" exclaimed Fouquet.—"I have, Monsieur."—"But the superintendent has never said that he wished to sell," resumed Pellisson.—"I beg your pardon," said Conrart; "you yourself spoke about it—"—"Yes, I am a witness to that," said Gourville.

"He seems very tenacious about his brilliant idea," said Fouquet, laughing. "Well, La Fontaine, who is the purchaser?"—"A perfect black bird, a counsellor belonging to the parliament, an excellent fellow."—"What is his name?"—"Vanel."

"Vanel!" exclaimed Fouquet,—"Vanel, the husband of—"—"Precisely,—her husband; yes, Monsieur."—"Poor fellow!" said Fouquet, with an expression of great interest; "he wishes to be procureur-général?"—"He wishes to be everything that you have been, Monsieur," said Gourville, "and to do everything that you have done."—"It is very agreeable; tell us all about it, La Fontaine."

"It is very simple. I see him occasionally; and a short time ago I met him walking about on the Place de la Bastille, at the very moment when I was about to take the small carriage to come down here to St. Mandé."—"He must have been watching his wife," interrupted Loret.

"Oh, no!" said La Fontaine; "he is far from being jealous. He accosted me, embraced me, and took me to the inn called L'Image-Saint-Fiacre, and told me a long story of his returning troubles."—

Digitized by Google

"He has his troubles, then?"—"Yes; his wife wants to make him ambitious."—"Well, and he told you—"—"That some one had spoken to him about a post in parliament; that M. Fouquet's name had been mentioned; that ever since, Madame Vanel dreams of nothing else but being called Madame the Procureuse-Générale, and that she is dying of it every night she is not dreaming of it."—"The deuce!"—"Poor woman!" said Fouquet.

"Wait a moment! Conrart is always telling me that I do not know how to conduct matters of business; you will see how I manage this one."—"Well, go on!"—"'I suppose you know,' said I to Vanel, 'that the value of a post such as that which M. Fouquet holds is by no means trifling.' 'How much do you imagine it to be?' he said. 'M. Fouquet, I know, has refused seventeen hundred thousand livres.' 'My wife,' replied Vanel, 'had estimated it at about fourteen hundred thousand.' 'Ready money?' I asked. 'Yes; she has sold some property of hers in Guienne, and has received the purchase-money.'"

"That's a pretty sum to touch all at once," said the Abbé Fouquet, who had not hitherto said a word.—"Poor Madame Vanel!" murmured Fouquet. Pellisson shrugged his shoulders. "A fiend!" he said in a low voice to Fouquet.—"That may be; it would be delightful to make use of this fiend's money to repair the injury which an angel has done herself for me."

Pellisson looked with a surprised air at Fouquet, whose thoughts were from that moment fixed upon a fresh object. "Well!" inquired La Fontaine, "what about my negotiation?"—"Admirable, my dear poet!"—"Yes," said Gourville; "but there are some persons who are anxious to have the steed who have not money enough to pay for the bridle."—"And Vanel would draw back from his offer if he were to be taken at his word," continued the Abbé Fouquet.—"I do not believe it," said La Fontaine.

"What do you know about it?"—"Why, you have not yet heard the *dénouement* of my story."—"If there is a *dénouement*, why do you beat about the bush so much?"—"*Semper ad adventum*. Is that correct?" said Fouquet, with the air of a nobleman who condescends to barbarisms. To this the Latinists present answered with loud applause.

"My *dénouement*," cried La Fontaine, "is that Vanel, that determined blackbird, knowing that I was coming to St. Mandé, implored me to bring him with me, and, if possible, to present him to M. Fouquet."—"So that—"—"So that he is here; I

left him in that part of the grounds called Bel-Air. Well, M. Fouquet, what is your reply? "—"Well, it is not fitting that the husband of Madame Vanel should catch cold on my grounds. Send for him, La Fontaine, since you know where he is."

"I will go myself."—"And I will accompany you," said the Abbé Fouquet; "I can carry the money-bags."—"No jesting," said Fouquet, seriously; "let the business be a serious one if it is to be one at all. But, first of all, let us be hospitable. Make my apologies, La Fontaine, to that gentleman, and tell him that I am distressed to have kept him waiting, but that I was not aware he was there." La Fontaine set off at once, fortunately accompanied by Gourville; for absorbed in his own calculations, the poet would have mistaken the route, and was hurrying as fast as he could towards the village of St. Maur.

Within a quarter of an hour afterwards M. Vanel was introduced into the superintendent's cabinet, the description and details of which have already been given at the beginning of this history. When Fouquet saw him enter, he called Pellisson, and whispered a few words in his ear: "Do not lose a word of what I am going to say. Let all the silver and gold plate, together with the jewels of every description, be packed up in the carriage. You will take the black horses; the jeweller will accompany you; and you will postpone the supper until Madame de Bellière's arrival."—"Will it be necessary to notify Madame de Bellière?" said Pellisson.—"No, that will be useless; I will do that."—"Very well."—"Go, my friend!"

Pellisson set off, not quite clear as to his friend's meaning or intention, but confident, like every true friend, in the judgment of the man he was blindly obeying. It is that which constitutes the strength of such men; distrust is awakened only by inferior natures.

Vanel bowed lowly to the superintendent, and was about to begin a speech. "Be seated, Monsieur!" said Fouquet, politely. "I am told that you wish to purchase a post I hold. How much can you give me for it?"—"It is for you, Monseigneur, to fix the price. I know that offers of purchase have already been made to you for it."

"Madame Vanel, I have been told, values it at fourteen hundred thousand livres."—"That is all we have."—"Can you give me the money immediately?"—"I have not the money with me," said Vanel, frightened almost by the unpretending simplicity, amounting to greatness, of the man; for he had expected disputes and difficulties, and opposition of every kind.

"When will you be able to have it?"—"Whenever you please, Monseigneur;" and he began to be afraid that Fouquet was trifling with him.

"If it were not for the trouble you would have in returning to Paris, I would say at once; but we will arrange that the payment and the signature shall take place at six o'clock to-morrow morning."—"Very good," said Vanel, as cold as ice, and feeling quite bewildered.

"Adieu, M. Vanel! Present my humblest respects to Madame Vanel," said Fouquet, as he rose; upon which Vanel, who felt the blood rushing up to his head, for he was quite confounded by his success, said seriously to the superintendent, "Will you give me your word, Monseigneur, upon this affair?" Fouquet turned round his head, saying, "*Pardieu!* and you, Monsieur?" Vanel hesitated, trembled all over, and at last finished by hesitatingly holding out his hand. Fouquet opened and nobly extended his own. This loyal hand lay for a moment in Vanel's moist, hypocritical palm; and he pressed it in his own, in order the better to convince himself. The superintendent gently disengaged his hand, as he again said, "Adieu." Vanel then ran hastily to the door, hurried along the vestibules, and fled.

CHAPTER CLXXXVI

MADAME DE BELLIÈRE'S PLATE AND DIAMONDS

When Fouquet had dismissed Vanel, he began to reflect. He said to himself: "A man never can do too much for the woman he has once loved. Marguerite wishes to be the wife of a procureur-général, and why not confer this pleasure upon her? And now that the most scrupulous and sensitive conscience will be unable to reproach me with anything, let my thoughts be bestowed on the woman who loves me. Madame de Bellière ought to be there by this time;" and he turned towards the secret door.

After Fouquet had locked himself in, he opened the subterranean passage, and rapidly hastened towards the means of communicating between the house at Vincennes and his own residence. He had neglected to apprise his friend of his approach by ringing the bell, perfectly assured that she would

never fail to be exact at the rendezvous. In fact, the marchioness had arrived, and was waiting. The noise the superintendent made aroused her; she ran to take from under the door the letter which he had thrust there, and which simply said, "Come, Marchioness; we are waiting supper for you." With her heart filled with happiness, Madame de Bellière ran to her carriage in the Avenue de Vincennes; in a few minutes she was holding out her hand to Gourville, who was standing at the entrance, where, in order the better to please his master, he had stationed himself to watch her arrival. She had not observed that Fouquet's black horses had arrived at the same time, smoking and covered with foam, having returned to St. Mandé with Pellisson and the very jeweller to whom Madame de Bellière had sold her plate and her jewels. Pellisson introduced the goldsmith into the cabinet, which Fouquet had not yet left. The superintendent thanked him for having been good enough to regard as a simple deposit in his hands the valuable property which he had had every right to sell. He cast his eyes on the total of the account, which amounted to thirteen hundred thousand livres. Then, going to his desk, he wrote an order for fourteen hundred thousand livres, payable at sight, at his treasury, before twelve o'clock the next day.

"A hundred thousand livres' profit!" cried the goldsmith. "Oh, Monseigneur, what generosity!"—"Nay, nay, not so, Monsieur," said Fouquet, touching him on the shoulder; "there are certain kindnesses which can never be repaid. The profit is about that which you would have made; but the interest of your money still remains to be arranged;" and saying this, he unfastened from his sleeve a diamond button, which the goldsmith himself had often valued at three thousand pistoles. "Take this," he said to the goldsmith, "in remembrance of me; and farewell! You are an honest man."—"And you, Monseigneur," cried the goldsmith, completely overcome, "are a grand nobleman!"

Fouquet let the worthy goldsmith pass out of the room by a secret door, and then went to receive Madame de Bellière, who was already surrounded by all the guests. The marchioness was always beautiful, but now her loveliness was dazzling.

"Do you not think, gentlemen," said Fouquet, "that Madame is incomparably beautiful this evening? And do you happen to know why?"—"Because Madame is the most beautiful of women," said some one.—"No; but because she is the best. And yet—"—"Yet?" said the marchioness, smiling.—"And

Digitized by Google

yet, all the jewels which Madame is wearing this evening are nothing but false stones."

At this remark the marchioness blushed most painfully. "Oh! oh!" exclaimed all the guests; "that can very well be said of one who has the finest diamonds in Paris."—"Well?" said Fouquet to Pellisson, in a low tone.—"Well, at last I have understood you," returned the latter; "and you have done well."—"That is pleasant," said the superintendent, with a smile.—"Supper is ready, Monseigneur," said Vatel, with majestic air and tone.

The crowd of guests hurried more rapidly than is customary at ministerial entertainments towards the banqueting-room, where a magnificent spectacle presented itself. Upon the buffets, upon the side-tables, upon the supper-table itself, in the midst of flowers and light, glittered most dazzlingly the richest and most costly gold and silver plate that was ever seen,—relics of those ancient magnificent productions which the Florentine artists, whom the Medici family had patronised, had sculptured, chased, and cast for the purpose of holding flowers, at a time when gold yet existed in France. These hidden marvels, which had been buried during the civil wars, had timidly reappeared during the intervals of that war of good taste called the Fronde, —when noblemen, fighting against noblemen, killed but did not pillage one another. All that plate had Madame de Bellière's arms engraved upon it. "Look!" cried La Fontaine, "here is a P and a B."

But the most remarkable object present was the cover which Fouquet had assigned to the marchioness. Near her was a pyramid of diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, antique cameos; sardonyx stones, carved by the old Greeks of Asia Minor, with mountings of Mysian gold; curious mosaics of ancient Alexandria, mounted in silver; and massive Egyptian bracelets lay heaped up in a large plate of Palissy ware, supported by a tripod of gilt bronze which had been sculptured by Benvenuto. The marchioness turned pale as she recognised what she had never expected to see again. A profound silence seemed to seize upon every one of the restless and excited guests. Fouquet did not even make a sign in dismissal of the richly liveried servants who crowded like bees round the huge buffets and other tables in the room. "Gentlemen," he said, "all this plate which you behold once belonged to Madame de Bellière, who having observed one of her friends in great distress, sent all this gold and silver, together with the heap of jewels now before her, to

her goldsmith. This noble conduct of a devoted friend can well be understood by such friends as you. Happy, indeed, is that man who sees himself loved in such a manner! Let us drink to the health of Madame de Bellière."

A tremendous burst of applause followed his words, and made poor Madame de Bellière sink back dumb and breathless on her seat. "And then," added Pellisson, whom all nobleness aroused and all beauty charmed, "let us also drink to the health of him who inspired Madame's noble conduct; for such a man is worthy of being worthily loved." It was now the marchioness's turn. She rose, pale and smiling; and as she held out her glass with a faltering hand, and her trembling fingers touched those of Fouquet, her look, full of love, found its reflection and response in that of her ardent and generous-hearted lover.

Begun in this manner, the supper soon became a *fête*. No one sought for wit, because no one was without it. La Fontaine forgot his Gorgny wine, and allowed Vatel to reconcile him to the wines of the Rhone and those from the shores of Spain. The Abbé Fouquet became so good-natured that Gourville said to him, "Take care, Monsieur the Abbé! If you are so tender, you will be eaten."

The hours passed away so joyously that, contrary to his usual custom, the superintendent did not leave the table before the end of the dessert. He smiled upon his friends, delighted as a man is whose heart becomes intoxicated before his head; and for the first time he looked at the clock. Suddenly a carriage rolled into the courtyard; and, strange to say, it was heard high above the noise of the mirth which prevailed. Fouquet listened attentively, and then turned his eyes towards the antechamber. It seemed as if he could hear a step passing across it, and as if this step, instead of touching the ground, pressed upon his heart. Involuntarily his foot parted company with the foot which Madame de Bellière had rested on his for two hours. "M. d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes!" the usher announced; and Aramis's grave and thoughtful face appeared in the doorway, between the remains of two garlands, the thread of which the flame of a lamp had just burned.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CLXXXVII

M. DE MAZARIN'S RECEIPT

FOUQUET would have uttered an exclamation of delight on seeing another friend arrive, if the cold air and constrained appearance of Aramis had not restored all his reserve. "Are you going to join us at our dessert?" he asked. "And yet you would be frightened, perhaps, at the noise we madcaps are making."—"Monseigneur," replied Aramis, respectfully, "I will begin by begging you to excuse me for having interrupted this merry meeting; and then I will beg you to give me, after your pleasure, a moment's audience on matters of business."

As the word "business" had aroused the attention of some of the epicureans present, Fouquet rose, saying, "Business first of all, M. d'Herblay; we are too happy when matters of business arrive only at the end of a meal." As he said this, Fouquet took the hand of Madame de Bellière, who looked at him with a kind of uneasiness, and then led her to an adjoining salon, after having recommended her to the most reasonable of his guests. And then, taking Aramis by the arm, the superintendent led him towards his cabinet.

Aramis, on reaching the cabinet, forgot respect and etiquette; he threw himself into a chair, saying, "Guess whom I have seen this evening?"—"My dear chevalier, every time you begin in that manner I am sure to hear you announce something disagreeable."—"Well, and this time you will not be mistaken, either, my dear friend," replied Aramis.—"Do not keep me in suspense," added the superintendent, phlegmatically.—"Well, then, I have seen Madame de Chevreuse."

"The old duchess, do you mean?"—"Yes."—"Her ghost, perhaps?"—"No, no; the old she-wolf herself."—"Without teeth?"—"Possibly, but not without claws."

"Well! what harm can she meditate against me? I am no miser, with women who are not prudes. Generosity is a quality that is always prized, even by the woman who no longer dares to provoke love."—"Madame de Chevreuse knows very well that you are not avaricious, since she wishes to draw some money out of you."—"Indeed! under what pretext?"—"Oh, pretexts are never wanting with her! Let me tell you what

Digitized by Google

hers is. It seems that the duchess has a good many letters of M. de Mazarin's in her possession."

"I am not surprised at that, for the prelate was gallant enough."—"Yes; but these letters have nothing whatever to do with the prelate's love affairs. They concern, it is said, financial matters."—"And accordingly they are much less interesting."

"Do you not suspect what I mean?"—"Not at all."—"You have never heard that there was a charge of embezzlement?"—"Yes, a hundred, nay, a thousand times. Since I have been engaged in public matters I have hardly heard anything else but that,—just as in your own case when you, a bishop, are charged with impiety, or a musketeer, with cowardice. The very thing of which they are always accusing ministers of finance is the embezzlement of public funds."

"Very good. But let us specify; for according to the duchess, M. de Mazarin specifies."—"Let us see what he specifies."—"Something like a sum of thirteen million livres, the disposal of which it would be very embarrassing for you to disclose."

"Thirteen millions!" said the superintendent, stretching himself in his arm-chair, in order to enable him the more comfortably to look up towards the ceiling,—"thirteen millions! I am trying to remember them out of all those I have been accused of stealing."—"Do not laugh, my dear Monsieur; it is serious. It is certain that the duchess has certain letters in her possession; and these letters must be genuine, since she wished to sell them to me for five hundred thousand livres."—"Oh, one can have a very tolerable calumny for such a sum as that!" replied Fouquet. "Ah! now I know what you mean;" and he began to laugh heartily.—"So much the better," said Aramis, a little reassured.

"I remember the story of those thirteen millions now. Yes, yes, I remember them quite well."

"I am delighted to hear it; tell me about them."—"Well, then, one day Signor Mazarin, Heaven rest his soul! made a profit of thirteen millions upon a concession of lands in the Valtelline; he cancelled them in the registry of receipts, sent them to me, and then made me advance them to him for war expenses."—"Very good; then there is no doubt of their proper disbursement?"—"No; the cardinal placed them under my name, and gave me a receipt."—"You have the receipt?"—"Of course," said Fouquet, as he quietly rose from his chair,

and went to his large ebony bureau, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold.

"What I most admire in you," said Aramis, with an air of great satisfaction, "is your memory, in the first place; then, your self-possession; and finally, the perfect order which prevails with you,—you, a poet *par excellence*."—"Yes," said Fouquet, "I am orderly out of a spirit of idleness, to save myself the trouble of looking after things; and so I know that Mazarin's receipt is in the third drawer under the letter M. I open the drawer, and place my hand upon the very paper I need. In the night, without a light, I could find it;" and with a confident hand he felt the bundle of papers which were piled up in the open drawer. "Nay, more than that," he continued, "I remember the paper as if I saw it. It is thick, somewhat crumpled, with gilt edges. Mazarin had made a blot upon the figure of the date. Ah!" he said, "the paper knows we are talking about it, and that we want it very much, and so it hides itself out of the way." As the superintendent looked into the drawer, Aramis rose from his seat. "This is very singular," said Fouquet.

"Your memory is treacherous, my dear Monseigneur; look in another drawer." Fouquet took out the bundle of papers, and turned them over once more; he then became very pale. "Don't confine your search to that drawer," said Aramis; "look elsewhere."—"Quite useless. I have never made a mistake. No one but myself arranges any papers of mine of this nature; no one but myself ever opens this drawer, of which, besides, no one but myself is aware of the secret."—"What do you conclude, then?" said Aramis, agitated.

"That Mazarin's receipt has been stolen from me. Madame de Chevreuse was right, Chevalier; I have appropriated the public funds; I have robbed the State coffers of thirteen millions of money; I am a thief, M. d'Herblay."—"Nay, nay; do not get irritated, do not get excited!"—"And why not, Chevalier? Surely there is every reason for it. If the legal proceedings are well arranged, and a judgment is given in accordance with them, your friend the superintendent can follow to Montfaucon his colleague Enguerrand de Marigny and his predecessor Samblançay."

"Oh," said Aramis, smiling, "not so fast!"—"And why not? Why not so fast? What do you suppose Madame de Chevreuse will have done with those letters,—for you refused them, I suppose?"—"Yes; at once. I suppose that she went

and sold them to M. Colbert."—"Well?"—"I said I supposed so. I might have said I was sure of it, for I had her followed; and when she left me, she returned to her own house, went out by a back door, and proceeded straight to the intendant's house in the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs."—"Legal proceedings will be instituted, then scandal and dishonour will follow; and all will fall upon me like a thunderbolt, blindly, harshly, pitilessly.

Aramis approached Fouquet, who sat trembling in his chair, close to the open drawers; he placed his hand on his shoulder, and in an affectionate tone of voice said, "Do not forget that the position of M. Fouquet can in no way be compared to that of Samblançay or of Marigny."—"And why not, in Heaven's name?"—"Because the proceedings against those ministers were determined, completed, and the sentence carried out; while in your case the same thing cannot take place."

"Another blow! Why not? A peculator is, under any circumstances, a criminal."—"Those criminals who know how to find a safe asylum are never in danger."—"What! Make my escape,—fly?"

"No; I do not mean that. You forget that all such proceedings originate in the parliament; that they are instituted by the procureur-général, and that you are the procureur-général. You see that unless you wish to condemn yourself—"—"Oh!" cried Fouquet suddenly, dashing his fist upon the table.—"Well, what? What is the matter?"—"I am procureur-général no longer."

Aramis at this reply became as livid as death; he pressed his hands together convulsively, and with a wild, haggard look, which almost annihilated Fouquet, said, laying a stress upon every syllable, "You are procureur-général no longer, do you say?"—"No."—"Since when?"—"Since four or five hours ago."

"Take care!" interrupted Aramis, coldly. "I do not think you are in full possession of your senses, my friend; collect yourself!"—"I tell you," returned Fouquet, "that a little while ago some one came to me, brought by my friends, to offer me fourteen hundred thousand livres for the appointment, and that I have sold it."

Aramis looked as if he had been thunder-stricken; the intelligent and mocking expression of his countenance was changed to an expression of gloom and terror which had more effect upon the superintendent than all the exclamations and speeches in the world. "You had need of money, then?" he said at

last.—"Yes; to discharge a debt of honour;" and in a few words he gave Aramis an account of Madame de la Bellière's generosity, and of the manner in which he had thought he ought to repay that generosity.

"Yes," said Aramis; "that is, indeed, a fine trait. What has it cost?"—"Exactly the fourteen hundred thousand livres,—the price of my appointment."—"Which you received in that manner, without reflection. Oh, imprudent friend!"

"I have not yet received the amount; but I shall to-morrow."—"It is not yet completed, then?"—"It must be carried out, though; for I have given the goldsmith, for twelve o'clock to-morrow, an order upon my treasury, into which the purchaser's money will be paid at six or seven o'clock."—"Heaven be praised!" cried Aramis, clapping his hands together; "nothing is yet completed, since you have not been paid."

"But the goldsmith?"—"You shall receive the fourteen hundred thousand livres from me at a quarter before twelve."—"Stay a moment! It is at six o'clock, this very morning, that I am to sign."—"Oh, I tell you that you will not sign."—"I have given my word, Chevalier."—"If you have given it, you will take it back again; that is all."

"Ah! what are you saying to me?" cried Fouquet, in a most expressive tone. "Fouquet recall his word, after it has been once pledged!" Aramis replied to the almost stern look of the minister with a look full of anger. "Monsieur," he said, "I believe I have deserved to be called a man of honour, have I not? As a soldier I have risked my life five hundred times; as a priest I have rendered great services, both to the State and to my friends. The value of a word, once passed, is estimated according to the worth of the man who gives it. So long as it is in his own keeping it is of the purest, finest gold; when his wish to keep it has passed away, it is a two-edged sword. With that word, therefore, he defends himself as with an honourable weapon, considering that when he disregards his word,—that man of honour,—he endangers his life; he courts the risk rather than that his adversary should secure advantages. And then, Monsieur, he appeals to Heaven and to justice."

Fouquet bent down his head, as he replied: "I am a poor Breton, opinionated and commonplace; my mind admires and fears yours. I do not say that I keep my word from a moral instinct; I keep it, if you like, by force of habit. But at all events, the ordinary run of men are simple enough to admire this custom of mine. It is my single virtue; leave me the

Digitized by Google

honour of it."—"And so you are determined to sign the sale of the office which would defend you against all your enemies?"—"Yes, I shall sign."—"You will deliver yourself up, then, bound hand and foot, from a false notion of honour, which the most scrupulous casuists would disdain?"—"I shall sign," repeated Fouquet.

Aramis sighed deeply, and looked all round him with the impatient gesture of a man who would gladly dash something to pieces, as a relief to his feelings. "We have still one means left," he said; "and I trust you will not refuse to make use of that?"—"Certainly not, if it be loyal and honourable,—as everything is, in fact, which you propose."—"I know nothing more loyal than a renunciation of your purchaser. Is he a friend of yours?"—"Certainly; but—"—"'But'!—if you allow me to manage the affair, I do not despair."—"Oh, you shall be absolute master!"

"With whom are you in treaty? What man is it?"—"I am not aware whether you know the parliament?"—"Most of its members. One of the presidents, perhaps?"—"No; only a counsellor—"—"Ah, ah!"—"Who is named Vanel."

Aramis became purple. "Vanel!" he cried, rising abruptly from his seat,—"Vanel! the husband of Marguerite Vanel?"—"Exactly."—"Of your former mistress?"—"Yes, my dear fellow. She is anxious to be Madame the Procureuse-Général. I certainly owed poor Vanel that slight concession; and I am a gainer by it, since I at the same time confer a pleasure on his wife."

Aramis walked straight to Fouquet, and took hold of his hand. "Do you know," he said, very calmly, "the name of Madame Vanel's new lover?"—"Ah! she has a new lover, then? I was not aware of it; no, I have no idea what his name is."—"His name is M. Jean Baptiste Colbert; he is intendant of the finances; he lives in the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, where Madame de Chevreuse has this evening carried Mazarin's letters, which she wishes to sell."—"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Fouquet, passing his hand across his forehead, from which the perspiration was starting.

"You now begin to understand, do you not?"—"That I am lost,—yes."—"Do you now think it worth while to be so scrupulous with regard to keeping your word?"—"Yes," said Fouquet.—"These obstinate people always contrive matters in such a way that one cannot but admire them," murmured Aramis.

Digitized by Google

Fouquet held out his hand to him; and at the very moment a richly ornamented tortoise-shell clock, supported by golden figures, which was standing on a console table opposite to the fireplace, struck six. The sound of a door opening in the vestibule was heard. "M. Vanel," said Gourville, at the door of the cabinet, "inquires if Monseigneur can receive him." Fouquet turned his eyes from those of Aramis and replied, "Let M. Vanel come in."

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII

M. COLBERT'S ROUGH DRAUGHT

VANEL, who entered at this stage of the conversation, was for Aramis and Fouquet the full stop which terminates a sentence. But, for Vanel, Aramis's presence in Fouquet's cabinet had quite another signification. At his first step into the room he fixed upon the delicate yet firm countenance of the Bishop of Vannes a look of astonishment which soon became one of scrutinising inquiry. As for Fouquet, a true politician,—that is to say, complete master of himself,—he had already, by the energy of his own resolute will, contrived to remove from his face all traces of the emotion which Aramis's revelation had occasioned. He was no longer, therefore, a man overwhelmed by misfortune and reduced to expedients; he held his head proudly erect, and extended his hand with a gesture of welcome to Vanel. He was prime minister; he was in his own house. Aramis knew the superintendent well; the delicacy of the feelings of his heart and the exalted nature of his mind could no longer surprise him. He confined himself, then, for the moment—intending to resume later an active part in the conversation—to the difficult rôle of a man who looks on and listens in order to learn and understand.

Vanel was visibly overcome, and advanced into the middle of the cabinet, bowing to everything and everybody. "I am come," he said.—"You are exact, M. Vanel," returned Fouquet. —"In matters of business, Monseigneur," replied Vanel, "I look upon exactitude as a virtue."—"No doubt, Monsieur."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Aramis, indicating Vanel with his finger, but addressing himself to Fouquet; "this is the gentleman, I believe, who has come about the purchase of

your appointment?"—"Yes, I am," replied Vanel, astonished at the extremely haughty tone with which Aramis had put the question; "but in what way am I to address you, who do me the honour—"—"Call me Monseigneur," replied Aramis, dryly. Vanel bowed.

"Come, gentlemen," said Fouquet, "a truce to these ceremonies! Let us proceed to business."—"Monseigneur sees," said Vanel, "that I am waiting his pleasure."—"On the contrary, it is I who wait," replied Fouquet.—"What for, may I be permitted to ask, Monseigneur?"—"I thought that perhaps you would have something to say."—"Oh," said Vanel to himself, "he has reflected on the matter, and I am lost!" But resuming his courage he continued, "No, Monseigneur, nothing,—absolutely nothing more than what I said to you yesterday, and which I am ready to repeat now."

"Come, now, tell me frankly, M. Vanel, is not the affair rather a burdensome one for you?"—"Certainly, Monseigneur; fourteen hundred thousand livres is an important sum."—"So important, indeed," said Fouquet, "that I have reflected—"—"You have been reflecting, do you say, Monseigneur?" exclaimed Vanel, anxiously.—"Yes! that you might not yet be in a position to purchase."—"Oh, Monseigneur!"

"Do not make yourself uneasy on that score, M. Vanel! I shall not blame you for a failure in your word, which evidently will be due to inability on your part."—"Oh, yes, Monseigneur, you would blame me, and you would be right in doing so," said Vanel: "for a man must be either imprudent or a fool to undertake engagements which he cannot keep; and I, at least, have always regarded a thing agreed upon as a thing done."

Fouquet coloured, while Aramis uttered a "Hum!" of impatience. "You would be wrong to emphasise such notions as those, Monsieur," said the superintendent: "for a man's mind is variable and full of little caprices, very excusable, and sometimes very worthy of respect; and a man may have wished for something yesterday, and to-day have changed his mind." Vanel felt a cold sweat trickle down his face. "Monseigneur!" he muttered.

Aramis, who was delighted to find the superintendent carrying on the debate with such clearness and precision, stood leaning his arm upon the marble top of a console table, and began to play with a small gold knife with a malachite handle. Fouquet did not hasten to reply; but after a moment's pause, "Come, my dear M. Vanel," he said, "I will explain to you how I am

situated." Vanel began to tremble. "Yesterday I wished to sell—"—"Monseigneur has done more than wish to sell; Monseigneur has sold."—"Well, well, that may be so; but to-day I ask you, as a favour, to restore me my word which I pledged you."—"I received your word as a perfect assurance that it would be kept."—"I know that; and that is the reason why I now entreat you,—do you understand me?—I entreat you to restore it to me."

Fouquet suddenly paused. The words "I entreat you," the force of which he did not immediately perceive, seemed almost to choke him as he uttered it. Aramis, still playing with his knife, fixed a look upon Vanel which seemed to search the inmost recess of his heart. Vanel simply bowed as he said, "I am overcome, Monseigneur, at the honour you do me to consult me upon a matter of business which is already completed; but—"—"Nay, do not say *but*, dear M. Vanel."—"Alas! Monseigneur, you see," he said, as he opened a large pocket-book, "I have brought the money with me,—the whole sum, I mean. And here, Monseigneur, is the contract of sale which I have just effected of a property belonging to my wife. The order is authentic in every way, the necessary signatures have been attached to it, and it is made payable at sight; it is ready money. In one word, the affair is complete."

"My dear M. Vanel, there is not a matter of business in this world, however important it may be, which cannot be postponed in order to oblige—"—"Certainly," said Vanel, awkwardly.—"To oblige a man who by that means might and would be made a devoted friend."—"Certainly, Monseigneur."—"And the more completely a friend, M. Vanel, in proportion to the importance of the service rendered, since the value of the service he had received would have been so considerable. Well, what do you decide?"

Vanel preserved silence. In the meantime Aramis had continued his observations. Vanel's narrow face, his deeply sunk orbits, his arched eyebrows, had revealed to the Bishop of Vannes the type of an avaricious and ambitious character. Aramis's method was to oppose one passion by another. He saw Fouquet defeated, demoralised; he threw himself into the contest with new weapons. "Excuse me, Monseigneur," he said; "you forget to show M. Vanel that his own interests are diametrically opposed to this renunciation of the sale."

Vanel looked at the bishop with astonishment; he had hardly expected to find an auxiliary in him. Fouquet also

Digitized by Google

paused to listen to the bishop. "Do you not see," continued Aramis, "that M. Vanel, in order to purchase your appointment, has been obliged to sell a property which belongs to his wife? Well, that is no slight matter; for one cannot displace fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand livres, as he has done, without considerable loss and very serious inconvenience."—"Perfectly true," said Vanel, whose secret Aramis had with his keen-sighted gaze wrung from the bottom of his heart.

"Such embarrassments," pursued Aramis, "resolve themselves into expenses; and when one has a large disbursement to make, expenses are to be considered."—"Yes, yes," said Fouquet, who began to understand Aramis's meaning.

Vanel remained silent; he, too, had understood him. Aramis observed his coldness of manner and his silence. "Very good," he said to himself, "you are waiting, I see, until you know the amount; but do not fear! I shall send you such a flight of crowns that you cannot but capitulate on the spot."—"We must offer M. Vanel a hundred thousand crowns at once," said Fouquet, carried away by his generous feelings.

The sum was a good one. A prince, even, would have been satisfied with such a bonus. A hundred thousand crowns at that period was the dowry of a king's daughter. Vanel, however, did not move. "He is a rascal!" thought the bishop; "we must offer the five hundred thousand livres at once!" and he made a sign to Fouquet.

"You seem to have spent more than that, dear M. Vanel," said the superintendent. "The price of money is enormous. You must have made a great sacrifice in selling your wife's property. Well, what can I have been thinking of? It is an order for five hundred thousand livres that I am about to sign for you; and even in that case I shall feel that I am greatly indebted to you."

There was not a single gleam of delight or desire on Vanel's face, which remained impassive; not a muscle of it changed in the slightest degree. Aramis cast a look of despair at Fouquet, and then, going straight up to Vanel and taking hold of him by the coat with the gesture used by men of high rank, he said: "M. Vanel, it is neither the inconvenience, nor the displacement of your money, nor the sale of your wife's property even, that you are thinking of at this moment; it is something still more important. I can well understand it; so pay particular attention to what I am going to say."—"Yes, Monseigneur," Vanel replied, beginning to tremble. The fire in the eyes of the

Digitized by Google

prelate scorched him. "I offer you, therefore, in the superintendent's name, not three hundred thousand livres, nor five hundred thousand, but a million. A million, do you understand me?" he added, as he shook him nervously. "A million!" repeated Vanel, as pale as death.

"A million; in other words, at the present rate of interest, an income of seventy thousand livres!"—"Come, Monsieur," said Fouquet, "you can hardly refuse that. Answer! Do you accept?"—"Impossible!" murmured Vanel.

Aramis bit his lips, and something like a white cloud passed over his face. That cloud indicated thunder. He still kept his hold on Vanel. "You have purchased the appointment for fifteen hundred thousand livres, I think? Well, we will give you these fifteen hundred thousand livres; by paying M. Fouquet a visit, and shaking hands with him, you will have become a gainer of a million and a half. You get honour and profit at the same time, M. Vanel."—"I cannot do it," said Vanel, hoarsely.

"Very well," replied Aramis, who had grasped Vanel so tightly by the coat that when he let go his hold Vanel staggered back a few paces,—"Very well! one can now see clearly enough your object in coming here."—"Yes," said Fouquet, "one can easily see that."—"But—" said Vanel, attempting to stand erect before the weakness of these two men of honour.

"The fellow presumes to speak!" said Aramis, with the tone of an emperor.—"Fellow?" repeated Vanel.—"The wretch, I meant to say," added the prelate, who had now resumed his usual self-possession. "Come, Monsieur, produce your deed of sale! You should have it there, in one of your pockets, already prepared, as an assassin holds his pistol or his dagger concealed under his cloak." Vanel began to mutter something. "Enough!" cried Fouquet. "Where is this deed?"

Vanel tremblingly searched in his pockets; and as he drew out his pocket-book, a paper fell out of it, while Vanel offered the other to Fouquet. Aramis pounced upon the paper which had fallen out, the handwriting of which he recognised.

"I beg your pardon," said Vanel; "that is a rough draught of the deed."—"I see that very clearly," retorted Aramis, with a smile more cutting than a lash of a whip would have been; "and what surprises me is that this draught is in M. Colbert's handwriting. Look, Monseigneur, look!" And he handed the paper to Fouquet, who recognised the truth of his remark; for, covered with erasures, with inserted words, the margins filled

Digitized by Google

with additions, this deed—an open proof of Colbert's plot—had just revealed everything to its unhappy victim.

"Well!" murmured Fouquet. Vanel, completely humiliated, seemed as if he were looking for some deep hole where he could hide himself. "Well!" said Aramis, "if your name were not Fouquet, and if your enemy's name were not Colbert,—if you had to deal only with this mean thief before you, I should say to you, 'Repudiate it!' Such a proof as this absolves you from your word. But these fellows would think you were afraid; they would fear you less than they do; therefore sign, Monseigneur!" and he held out a pen towards him.

Fouquet pressed Aramis's hand; but instead of the deed which Vanel handed to him, he took the rough draught of it. —"No, not that paper," said Aramis, hastily; "this is the one. The other is too precious a document for you to part with."— "No, no!" replied Fouquet. "I will sign upon the paper of M. Colbert; and I write, 'The writing is approved.'" He then signed, and said, "Here it is, M. Vanel;" and the latter seized the paper, laid down his money, and was about to retreat.

"One moment!" said Aramis. "Are you quite sure the exact amount is there? It ought to be counted over, M. Vanel, particularly, since it is money which M. Colbert presents to the ladies. Ah, that worthy M. Colbert is not so generous as M. Fouquet!" and Aramis, spelling every word, every letter of the order to pay, distilled his wrath and his contempt, drop by drop, upon the miserable wretch, who had to submit to this torture for a quarter of an hour. He was then dismissed, not in words, but by a gesture, as one dismisses a beggar or discharges a menial.

As soon as Vanel had gone, the minister and the prelate, their eyes fixed on each other, remained silent for a few moments. "Well," said Aramis, the first to break the silence, "to what can that man be compared, who, entering into a conflict with an enemy armed from head to foot, thirsting for his life, strips himself, throws down his arms, and sends kisses to his adversary? Good faith, M. Fouquet, is a weapon which scoundrels very frequently make use of against men of honour, and it answers their purpose. Men of honour ought in their turn, also, to make use of bad faith against such scoundrels. You would soon see how strong they would become without ceasing to be men of honour."—"It would be rascally conduct," replied Fouquet.

"Not at all; it would be merely coquetting or playing with the truth. And now, since you have finished with this Vanel, since you have deprived yourself of the happiness of confound-

ing him by repudiating your word, and since you have given up, to be used against yourself, the only weapon which can ruin us—"—"My dear friend," said Fouquet, mournfully, "you are like the teacher of philosophy whom La Fontaine was telling us about the other day; he saw a child drowning, and began to read him a lecture divided into three heads."

Aramis smiled as he said, "Philosophy,—yes, teacher,—yes; a drowning child,—yes; but a child that can be saved,—you shall see. And, first of all, let us talk about business." Fouquet looked at him with an air of astonishment. "Did you not some time ago speak to me about an idea you had of giving a *fête* at Vaux?"—"Oh," said Fouquet, "that was when affairs were flourishing!"

"A *fête*, I believe, to which the king, without prompting, invited himself?"—"No, no, my dear prelate; a *fête* to which M. Colbert advised the king to invite himself!"—"Ah! exactly; as it would be a *fête* of so costly a character that you would be ruined in giving it?"

"Precisely so. In other times, as I said just now, I had a kind of pride in showing my enemies the fruitfulness of my resources; I felt it a point of honour to strike them with amazement, in creating millions under circumstances where they had imagined nothing but bankruptcies possible. But at the present day I am arranging my accounts with the State, with the king, with myself; and I must now become a mean, stingy man. I shall be able to prove to the world that I can act or operate with my deniers as I used to do with my bags of pistoles; and beginning to-morrow, my equipages shall be sold, my houses mortgaged, my expenses contracted."—"Beginning with to-morrow," interrupted Aramis, quietly, "you will occupy yourself, without the slightest delay, with your *fête* at Vaux, which must hereafter be spoken of with the most magnificent productions of your most prosperous days."

"You are mad, Chevalier d'Herblay."—"I? You do not think that."—"What do you mean, then? Do you not know that a *fête* at Vaux, of the very simplest possible character, would cost four or five millions?"—"I do not speak of a *fête* of the very simplest possible character, my dear Superintendent."—"But since the *fête* is to be given to the king," replied Fouquet, who misunderstood Aramis's idea, "it cannot be simple."—"Just so; it ought to be on a scale of the most unbounded magnificence."

"In that case I shall have to spend ten or twelve millions."—

"You shall spend twenty if you require it," said Aramis, calmly. —"Where shall I get them?" exclaimed Fouquet.—"That is my affair, Monsieur the Superintendent; and do not be uneasy for a moment about it. The money will be placed at once at your disposal, sooner than you will have arranged the plans of your *fête*."

"Chevalier! Chevalier!" said Fouquet, giddy with amazement, "whither are you hurrying me?"—"Across the gulf into which you were about to fall," replied the Bishop of Vannes. "Take hold of my cloak and throw fear aside!"—"Why did you not tell me that sooner, Aramis? There was a day when with only one million you could have saved me."—"While to-day I can give you twenty," said the prelate. "Such is the case, however. The reason is very simple. On the day you speak of I had not at my disposal the million which you needed, while now I can easily procure the twenty millions we require."—"May Heaven hear you, and save me!"

Aramis smiled, with the singular expression habitual with him. "Heaven never fails to hear me," he said; "perhaps because I pray with a loud voice."—"I abandon myself to you unreservedly," Fouquet murmured.

"No, no; I do not understand it in that manner. It is I who am entirely at your service. Therefore you, who have the clearest, the most delicate, and the most ingenious mind,—you shall have entire control over the *fête*, even to the very smallest details. Only—"—"Only?" said Fouquet, as a man accustomed to appreciate the value of a parenthesis.—"Well, then, leaving the entire invention of the details to you, I shall reserve to myself a general superintendence over the execution."—"In what way?"—"I mean that you will make of me, on that day, a major-domo, a sort of inspector-general, or factotum,—something between a captain of the guard and manager or steward. I will look after the people, and will keep the keys of the doors. You will give your orders, of course; but will give them to no one but to me. They will pass through my lips, to reach those for whom they are intended,—you understand?"

"No, I do not understand."—"But you agree?"—"Of course, of course, my friend."—"That is all I care about, then. Thanks; and now go and prepare your list of invitations."—"Whom shall I invite?"—"Every one."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CLXXXIX

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR THINKS IT IS NOW TIME TO RETURN TO THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

Our readers have observed in this history the adventures of the new and of the past generation unrolled, as it were, side by side. To the former, the reflection of the glory of earlier years, the experience of the bitter things of this world; to the former, also, the peace which takes possession of the heart, and the healing of the scars which were formerly deep and painful wounds. To the latter, the conflicts of love and vanity, bitter disappointments and ineffable delights,—life instead of memory. If any variety has been presented to the reader in the different episodes of this tale, it is to be attributed to the numerous shades of colour which are presented on this double palette, where two pictures are seen side by side, mingling and harmonising their severe and pleasing tones. The repose of the emotions of the one is found in the midst of the emotions of the other. After having talked reason with older heads, one likes to share in the wildness of young people. Therefore, if the threads of this story do not seem very intimately to connect the chapter we are now writing with that we have just written, we do not intend to give ourselves any more thought or trouble about it than Ruysdael took in painting an autumn sky after having finished a spring-time scene. We wish our readers to do as much, and to resume Raoul de Bragelonne's story at the very place where our last sketch left him.

In a state of frenzy and dismay,—or rather without reason, without will, without purpose,—Raoul fled heedlessly away after the scene in La Vallière's room. The king, Montalais, Louise, that chamber, that strange exclusion, Louise's grief, Montalais's terror, the king's wrath,—all seemed to indicate some misfortune. But what? He had arrived from London because he had been told of the existence of a danger, and at once this danger showed itself. Was not that sufficient for a lover? Certainly it was; but it was insufficient for a pure and upright heart such as his. And yet Raoul did not seek for explanations in the quarter where all jealous or less timid lovers would have sought them. He did not go straightway to his mistress, and say, "Louise, is it true that you love me no

longer? Is it true that you love another?" Full of courage, full of friendship, as he was full of love; a religious observer of his word, and believing the words of others,—Raoul said within himself, "Guiche wrote to put me on my guard; Guiche knows something; I will go and ask Guiche what he knows, and tell him what I have seen."

The journey was not a long one. Guiche, who had been brought from Fontainebleau to Paris within the last two days, was beginning to recover from his wound, and to walk about a little in his room. He uttered a cry of joy as he saw Raoul enter his apartment with the eagerness of friendship. Raoul uttered a cry of grief on seeing De Guiche so pale, so thin, so melancholy. A few words, and a simple gesture which De Guiche made to put aside Raoul's arm, were sufficient to inform the latter of the truth. "Ah! so it is," said Raoul, seating himself beside his friend; "one loves and dies."—"No, no, not dies," replied Guiche, smiling, "since I am now recovering, and since, too, I can press you in my arms."—"Ah! I understand."

"And I understand you too. You fancy I am unhappy, Raoul?"—"Alas!"—"No! I am the happiest of men. My body suffers, but not my mind or my heart. If you only knew —Oh, I am, indeed, the very happiest of men!"—"So much the better," replied Raoul; "so much the better, provided it lasts."—"It is over. I have had enough happiness to last me to my dying day, Raoul."

"I have no doubt you have had; but she—"—"Listen! I love her, because— But you are not listening to me."—"I beg your pardon."—"Your mind is preoccupied."—"Well, yes; your health, in the first place—"—"It is not that."—"My dear friend, you would be wrong, I think, to ask me any questions,—*you!*" and he laid so much weight upon the "you" that he completely enlightened his friend upon the nature of the evil and the difficulty of remedying it.

"You say that, Raoul, on account of what I wrote to you." —"Certainly. We will talk over that matter a little when you shall have finished telling me of all your own pleasures and pains."—"My dear friend, I am entirely at your service now." —"Thank you. I have hurried, I have flown here,—I came here from London in half the time the government couriers usually take. Now, tell me, my dear friend, what did you want?"—"Nothing whatever, but to make you come."— "Well, then, I am here."

"All is quite right, then."—"There is still something else

I imagine? "—"No, indeed."—"De Guiche!"—"Upon my honour!"—"You cannot possibly have crushed all my hopes so violently, or have exposed me to being disgraced by the king for my return, which is in disobedience of his orders,—you cannot, in short, have planted jealousy in my heart, merely to say to me, 'It is all right, sleep quietly!'"—"I do not say to you, Raoul, 'Sleep quietly!' But pray understand me; I never will, nor can I indeed, tell you anything else."

"Oh, my friend, for whom do you take me?"—"What do you mean?"—"If you know anything, why conceal it from me? If you do not know anything, why did you warn me?"—"True, true! I was very wrong, and I regret having done so, Raoul. It seems nothing to write to a friend and say, 'Come;' but to have this friend face to face, to feel him tremble and breathlessly wait to hear what one hardly dare tell him—"—"Dare! I have courage enough, if you have not," exclaimed Raoul, in despair.

"See how unjust you are, and how soon you forget you have to do with a poor wounded fellow,—the half of your heart! Calm yourself, Raoul! I said to you, 'Come;' you are here. Ask nothing further of the unhappy De Guiche."—"You summoned me in the hope that I should see with my own eyes, did you not? Nay, do not hesitate, for I have seen all."—"Oh!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Or at least I thought—"—"There now, you see you are not sure. But if you have any doubt, my poor friend, what remains for me to do?"—"I have seen Louise agitated, Montalais in a state of bewilderment, the king—"—"The king?"—"Yes. You turn your head aside. The danger is there, the evil is there! tell me, is it not so,—it is the king?"—"I say nothing."

"Oh, you say a thousand upon a thousand times more than nothing! Give me facts! for pity's sake, give me proofs! My friend, the only friend I have, speak! My heart is crushed, wounded to death; I am dying from despair."—"If that really be so, my dear Raoul," replied De Guiche, "you relieve me from my difficulty, and I will tell you all, sure that I can tell you nothing but what is consoling, compared to the despair in which I now see you."—"Go on, go on! I am listening."—"Well, then, I can only tell you what you can learn from the first-comer."—"From the first-comer? It is talked about?" cried Raoul.

"Before you say people talk about it, learn what it is that people can talk about. I assure you, solemnly, that people only

talk about what may in truth be very innocent; perhaps a walk—"—"Ah! a walk with the king?"—"Yes, certainly, a walk with the king; and I believe the king has very frequently before taken walks with ladies, without on that account—"

"You would not have written to me, shall I say again, if there had been nothing unusual in this promenade?"—"I know that while the storm lasted, it would have been far better if the king had taken shelter somewhere else than to have remained with his head uncovered before La Vallière; but—"—"But?"—"The king is so courteous!"

"Oh, De Guiche, De Guiche, you are killing me!"—"Do not let us talk any more, then."—"Nay; let us continue. This walk was followed by others, I suppose?"—"No—I mean yes; there was the adventure of the oak, I think. But I know nothing about the matter at all." Raoul rose; De Guiche endeavoured to imitate him, notwithstanding his weakness. "Well, I will not add another word; I have said either too much or not enough. Let others give you further information if they will, or if they can; my duty was to warn you, and that I have done. Watch over your own affairs now, yourself!"

"Question others? Alas! you are no true friend to speak to me in that manner," said the young man, in utter distress. "The first man I shall question may be either evilly disposed or a fool,—if the former, he will tell me a lie to torment me; if the latter, he will do still worse. Ah! De Guiche, De Guiche, before two hours are over, I shall have been told ten falsehoods, and shall have as many duels on my hands. Save me, then! Is it not best to know one's whole misfortune?"

"But I know nothing, I tell you. I was wounded, in a fever; my senses were gone, and I have only effaced impressions of it all. But there is no reason why we should search very far, when the very man we want is close at hand. Is not D'Artagnan your friend?"—"Oh, true, true!"—"Go to him, then. He will throw light on the subject and without seeking to injure your eyes."

At this moment a lackey entered the room. "What is it?" said De Guiche.—"Some one is waiting for Monseigneur in the Cabinet des Porcelaines."—"Very well. Will you excuse me, my dear Raoul? I am so proud since I have been able to walk again."—"I would offer you my arm, De Guiche, if I did not guess that the person in question is a lady."—"I believe so," said De Guiche, smiling, as he quitted Raoul.

Raoul remained motionless, absorbed, overwhelmed, like the

Digitized by Google

miner upon whom a vault has just fallen in: he is wounded, his life-blood is welling fast, his thoughts are confused; he endeavours to recover himself, and to save his life and his reason. A few minutes were all Raoul needed to dissipate the bewildering sensations which had been occasioned by these two revelations. He had already recovered the thread of his ideas, when suddenly through the door he fancied he recognised Montalais's voice in the Cabinet des Porcelaines. "She!" he cried. "Yes; it is indeed her voice! Oh! here is a woman who can tell me the truth; but shall I question her here? She conceals herself even from me; she is coming, no doubt, from Madame. I will see her in her own apartment. She will explain her alarm, her flight, the strange manner in which I was driven out; she will tell me all that,—after M. d'Artagnan, who knows everything, shall have given me fresh strength and courage. Madame—a coquette, I fear, and yet a coquette who is herself in love—has her moments of kindness; a coquette who is as capricious and uncertain as life or death, but who causes De Guiche to say that he is the happiest of men. He at least is lying on roses." And so he hastily quitted the count's apartments; and reproaching himself as he went for having talked of nothing but his own affairs to De Guiche, he arrived at D'Artagnan's quarters.

CHAPTER CXC

BRAGELONNE CONTINUES HIS INQUIRIES

THE captain was sitting buried in his leathern arm-chair, his spur fixed in the floor, his sword between his legs, and was occupied in reading a great number of letters, as he twisted his moustache. D'Artagnan uttered a welcome full of pleasure when he perceived his friend's son. "Raoul, my boy," he said, "by what lucky accident does it happen that the king has recalled you?"

These words did not sound over-agreeably in the young man's ears, who as he seated himself replied, "Upon my word, I cannot tell you; all that I know is that I have come back."—"Hum!" said D'Artagnan, folding up his letters and directing a look full of meaning at him. "What do you say, my boy?—that the king has not recalled you, and that you have returned? I do not at all understand that."

Digitized by Google

Raoul was already pale enough, and he began to turn his hat round and round in his hand with an air of constraint. "What the deuce is the matter, that you look as you do, and what makes you so dumb?" said the captain. "Do people catch that fashion in England? I have been in England, and came back again as lively as a chaffinch. Will you not say something?"—"I have too much to say."—"Ah! ah! how is your father?"—"Forgive me, my dear friend; I was going to ask you that."

D'Artagnan increased the sharpness of his penetrating gaze, which no secret was capable of resisting. "You are unhappy about something," he said.—"I am, indeed; and you know very well what, M. d'Artagnan."—"I?"—"Of course. Nay, do not pretend to be astonished."—"I am not pretending to be astonished, my friend."

"Dear Captain, I know very well that in all trials of *finesse*, as well as in all trials of strength, I shall be beaten by you. You can see that at the present moment I am an idiot, a fool. I have neither head nor arm; do not despise, but help me. In a few words, I am the most wretched of living beings."—"Oh! oh! why that?" inquired D'Artagnan, unbuckling his belt and softening the ruggedness of his smile.—"Because Mademoiselle de la Vallière is deceiving me."

"She is deceiving you?" said D'Artagnan, not a muscle of whose face had moved. "Those are big words. Who makes use of them?"—"Every one."—"Ah! if every one says so, there must be some truth in it. I begin to believe there is fire when I see the smoke. It is ridiculous, perhaps, but so it is."

"Therefore you do believe?" exclaimed Bragelonne, quickly. —"I never mix myself up in affairs of that kind; you know that very well."—"What! not for a friend, for a son?"—"Exactly. If you were a stranger, I should tell you—I should tell you nothing at all. How is Porthos, do you know?"

"Monsieur," cried Raoul, pressing D'Artagnan's hand, "I entreat you, in the name of the friendship you have vowed to my father!"—"The deuce take it, you are really ill—from curiosity."—"No, it is not from curiosity; it is from love."

"Good! Another grand word! If you were really in love, my dear Raoul, you would be very different."—"What do you mean?"—"I mean that if you were so deeply in love that I could believe I was addressing myself to your heart— But it is impossible."—"I tell you I love Louise to distraction."

D'Artagnan could read to the very bottom of the young man's heart.

"Impossible, I tell you," he said. "You are like all young men,—you are not in love, you are out of your senses."—"Well, suppose it were only that?"—"No sensible man ever succeeded in making much of a brain when the head was turned. I have lost my bearings in the same way a hundred times in my life. You would listen to me, but you would not hear me; you would hear, but you would not understand me; you would understand, but you would not obey me."—"Oh, try, try!"

"I say more. Even if I were unfortunate enough to know something, and foolish enough to communicate it to you—You are my friend, you say?"—"Indeed, yes."—"Very good. I should quarrel with you. You would never forgive me for having destroyed your illusion, as people say of love-affairs."

"M. d'Artagnan, you know all; and yet you plunge me in perplexity, in despair, in death."—"There, there!"—"I never complain, as you know; but as Heaven and my father would never forgive me for blowing out my brains, I will go and get the first person I meet to give me the information which you withhold; I will tell him he lies, and—"—"And you will kill him? A fine affair that would be! So much the better. What should I care for it? Kill, my boy, kill, if it can give you any pleasure. It is exactly like a man with the toothache, who keeps on saying, 'Oh, what torture I am suffering! I could bite iron.' My answer always is, 'Bite, my friend, bite; the tooth will remain all the same.'"—"I shall not kill any one, Monsieur," said Raoul, gloomily.

"Yes, yes; you fellows of to-day put on those airs. Instead of killing, you will get killed youself, I suppose you mean? Very fine indeed! How much I should regret you! I should say all day long: 'Ah! what a high-flown simpleton that Bragelonne was,—doubly an ingrate! I have passed my whole life almost in teaching him how to hold his sword properly, and the silly fellow has got himself spitted like a lark.' Go, then, Raoul, go and get yourself disposed of, if you like. I don't know who taught you logic; but, God damn me,—as the English say,—whoever it was, Monsieur, has stolen your father's money."

Raoul buried his face in his hands, murmuring, "No, no; I have not a single friend in the world!"—"Oh, bah!" said D'Artagnan.—"I meet with nothing but raillery or indifference."—"Idle fancies, Monsieur! I do not laugh at you, although

Digitized by Google

I am a Gascon. And as for being indifferent, if I were so I should have sent you to all the devils a quarter of an hour ago; for you would sadden a man who was wild with joy, and would kill one who was sad. How now, young man! Do you wish me to disgust you with the girl to whom you are attached, and to teach you to execrate women, who are the honour and happiness of human life?"—"Oh, tell me, Monsieur, and I will bless you!"

"Do you think, my dear fellow, that I can have crammed into my brain all that business about the carpenter and the painter and the staircase and the portrait, and a hundred other tales to sleep over?"—"A carpenter! what do you mean?"—"Upon my word, I don't know. Some one told me there was a carpenter who made an opening through a floor."

"In La Vallière's room?"—"Oh, I don't know where!"—"In the king's apartment, perhaps?"—"Of course! If it were in the king's apartment, I should tell you, I suppose."—"In whose room, then?"—"I have told you for the last hour that I know nothing of the whole affair."

"But the painter, then,—the portrait?"—"It seems that the king wished to have the portrait of one of the ladies belonging to the court."—"La Vallière's?"—"Why, you seem to have only that name in your mouth! Who spoke to you of La Vallière?"—"If it be not her portrait, then, why do you suppose it would concern me?"—"I do not suppose it will concern you. But you ask me all sorts of questions, and I answer you; you wish to know the current scandal, and I tell you. Make the best you can of it!"

Raoul struck his forehead with his hand, in utter despair. "It will kill me!" he said.—"So you have said already."—"Yes, you're right;" and he made a step or two as if he were going to leave.

"Where are you going?"—"To find some one who will tell me the truth."—"Who is that?"—"A woman."—"Mademoiselle de la Vallière herself, I suppose you mean?" said D'Artagnan, with a smile. "Ah, a famous idea that! You wish to be consoled by some one, and you will be so at once. She will tell you nothing ill of herself, of course. So be off!"

"You are mistaken, Monsieur," replied Raoul; "the woman I mean will tell me all the evil she possibly can."—"Montalais, I'll wager."—"Yes, Montalais."—"Ah! her friend,—a woman who in that capacity will exaggerate all that is either bad or good in the matter. Do not talk to Montalais, my good Raoul."

"You have some reason for wishing me not to talk with Montalais?"—"Well, I admit it. And, in point of fact, why should I play with you as a cat does with a poor mouse? You distress me,—you do indeed. And if I wish you not to speak to Montalais just now, it is because you will be betraying your secret, and people will take advantage of it. Wait, if you can!"—"I cannot."—"So much the worse. Why, you see, Raoul, if I had an idea—but I have not got one."

"Promise that you will pity me, my friend,—that is all I need,—and leave me to get out of the affair by myself."—"Oh, yes, indeed, in order that you may get deeper into the mire! A capital idea, truly! Go and sit down at that table and take a pen in your hand."—"What for?"—"To write to ask Montalais to give you an interview."—"Ah!" said Raoul, snatching eagerly at the pen which the captain held out to him.

Suddenly the door opened; and one of the musketeers, approaching D'Artagnan, said, "Captain, Mademoiselle de Montalais is here, and wishes to speak to you."—"To me?" murmured D'Artagnan. "Ask her to come in. I shall soon see," he said to himself, "whether she wishes to speak to me or not."

The cunning captain was quite right in his suspicions; for as soon as Montalais entered, she exclaimed, "Oh, Monsieur! Monsieur!—I beg your pardon, M. d'Artagnan."—"Oh, I forgive you, Mademoiselle," said D'Artagnan; "I know that at my age those who look for me have great need of me."—"I was looking for M. de Bragelonne," replied Montalais.

"How very fortunate that is! He was looking for you too. Raoul, will you accompany Mademoiselle Montalais?"—"Oh, certainly!"—"Go along, then," he said, as he gently pushed Raoul out of the cabinet; and then taking hold of Montalais's hand, he said in a low voice, "Be kind towards him; spare him, and spare her too, if you can."—"Ah!" she said in the same tone of voice, "it is not I who will speak to him."—"Who, then?"—"It is Madame who has sent for him."

"Very good," cried D'Artagnan; "it is Madame, is it? In an hour's time, then, the poor fellow will be cured."—"Or else dead," said Montalais, in a voice full of compassion. "Adieu, M. d'Artagnan!" she said; and she ran to join Raoul, who was waiting for her at a little distance from the door, very much puzzled and uneasy at the dialogue, which promised no good to him.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CXCI

TWO JEALOUSIES

LOVERS are very tender towards everything which concerns the person with whom they are in love. Raoul no sooner found himself alone with Montalais than he kissed her hand with rapture. "There, there," said the young girl, sadly, "you are throwing your kisses away; I will guarantee that they will not bring you back any interest."—"How so? Why? Will you explain to me, my dear Aure?"—"Madame will explain everything to you. I am going to take you to her apartments."

"What!"—"Silence; and throw aside your wild and savage looks. The windows here have eyes; the walls have ears. Have the kindness not to look at me any longer; be good enough to speak to me aloud of the rain, of the fine weather, and of the charms of England."—"At all events—" interrupted Raoul.—"I tell you, I warn you, that somewhere, I know not where, Madame is sure to have eyes and ears open. I am not very desirous, you can easily believe, to be dismissed or thrown into the Bastille. Let us talk, I tell you; or rather, do not let us talk at all."

Raoul clinched his hands, and assumed the look and gait of a man of courage, but of a man of courage on his way to the torture. Montalais, glancing in every direction, walking along with an easy swinging gait, and holding up her head pertly in the air, preceded him to Madame's apartments, where he was at once introduced. "Well," he thought, "this day will pass away without my learning anything. De Guiche had too much consideration for my feelings. He has no doubt an understanding with Madame; and both of them, by a friendly plot, have agreed to postpone the solution of the problem. Why have I not here a good enemy,—the serpent De Wardes, for instance? That he would bite is very likely; but I should not hesitate any more. To hesitate, to doubt,—better by far to die!"

Raoul was in Madame's presence. Henrietta, more charming than ever, was half lying, half reclining in her arm-chair, her little feet upon an embroidered velvet cushion; she was playing with a little kitten with long silky fur, which was biting her fingers and hanging by the lace of her collar. Madame was

Digitized by Google

thinking; she was thinking profoundly. It required both Montalais's and Raoul's voice to disturb her from her reverie. "Your Highness sent for me?" repeated Raoul.

Madame shook her head, as if she were just awakening, and then said: "Good-morning, M. de Bragelonne. Yes, I sent for you. So you have returned from England?"—"Yes, Madame, and I am at your royal Highness's commands."—"Thank you. Leave us, Montalais!" and the latter immediately left the room.

"You have a few minutes to give me, M. de Bragelonne, have you not?"—"All my life is at your royal Highness's disposal," Raoul returned, with respect, guessing that there was something serious under all these outward courtesies of Madame; nor was he displeased, indeed, to observe the seriousness of her manner, feeling persuaded that there was some sort of affinity between Madame's sentiments and his own. In fact, every one at court of any perception at all well knew the capricious fancy and absurd despotism of the princess's singular character. Madame had been flattered beyond all bounds by the king's attentions; she had made herself talked about; she had inspired the queen with that mortal jealousy which is the gnawing worm at the root of every woman's happiness. Madame, in a word, in her attempts to cure a wounded pride, had found that her heart had become deeply and passionately attached. We know what Madame had done to recall Raoul, who had been sent out of the way by Louis XIV. Raoul did not know of her letter to Charles II., although D'Artagnan had guessed its contents. Who will undertake to account for that seemingly inexplicable mixture of love and vanity, that passionate tenderness of feeling, that prodigious duplicity of conduct? No one can, indeed; not even the bad angel who kindles the love of coquetry in the heart of woman.

"M. de Bragelonne," said the princess, after a moment's pause, "have you returned satisfied?" Bragelonne looked at Madame Henrietta, and seeing how pale she was, from what she was keeping back, from what she was burning to disclose, replied: "Satisfied? What is there for me to be satisfied or dissatisfied about, Madame?"

"But what are those things with which a man of your age and of your appearance is usually either satisfied or dissatisfied?"—"How eager she is!" thought Raoul, terrified. "What is it that she is going to breathe into my heart?" and then, frightened at what she might possibly be going to tell him, and

Digitized by Google

wishing to put off the moment so wished for but so dreadful, when he should learn all, he replied, "I left behind me, Madame, a dear friend in good health, and on my return I find him very ill."

"You refer to M. de Guiche," replied Madame Henrietta, with the most imperturbable self-possession; "I have heard he is a very dear friend of yours."—"He is, indeed, Madame."—"Well, it is quite true he has been wounded; but he is better now. Oh, M. de Guiche is not to be pitied!" she said hurriedly; and then, recovering herself, added, "But has he anything to complain of? Has he complained of anything? Is there any cause of grief or sorrow with which we are not acquainted?"—"I allude only to his wound, Madame."—"So much the better, then, for in other respects M. de Guiche seems to be very happy,—he is always in very high spirits. I am sure that you, M. de Bragelonne, would far prefer to be, like him, wounded only in the body,—for what, indeed, is such a wound, after all?"

Raoul started. "Alas!" he said to himself, "she is returning to it." He made no reply. "What did you say?" she inquired.—"I did not say anything, Madame."—"You did not say anything. You disapprove of my observation, then. You are perfectly satisfied, I suppose?"

Raoul approached closer to her. "Madame," he said, "your royal Highness wishes to say something to me, and your instinctive kindness and generosity of disposition induce you to be careful and considerate as to your manner of conveying it. Will your royal Highness throw this kind forbearance aside? I am strong, and I am listening."—"Ah!" replied Henrietta, "what do you understand, then?"—"That which your royal Highness wishes me to understand," said Raoul, trembling, notwithstanding his command over himself, as he pronounced these words.—"In point of fact," murmured the princess, "it seems cruel; but since I have begun—"—"Yes, Madame, since your Highness has deigned to begin, will you deign to finish—"

Henrietta rose hurriedly, and walked a few paces up and down her room. "What did M. de Guiche tell you?" she said suddenly.—"Nothing, Madame."—"Nothing! Did he say nothing? Ah, how well I recognise him in that!"—"No doubt he wished to spare me."—"And that is what friends call friendship. But surely M. d'Artagnan, whom you have just left, must have told you."—"No more than De Guiche, Madame."

Henrietta made a gesture full of impatience, as she said, "At

Digitized by Google

least, you know all that the court has known?"—"I know nothing at all, Madame?"—"Not the scene in the storm?"—"Not the scene in the storm."—"Not the *tête-à-tête* in the forest?"—"Not the *tête-à-tête* in the forest."—"Nor the flight to Chaillot?"

Raoul, whose head drooped like the flower which has been cut down by the sickle, made an almost superhuman effort to smile as he replied with the greatest gentleness: "I have had the honour to tell your royal Highness that I am absolutely ignorant of everything,—that I am a poor unremembered outcast, who has this moment arrived from England. There have been so many stormy waves between myself and those whom I left behind me here, that the rumour of none of the circumstances your Highness refers to has been able to reach me."

Henrietta was affected by his extreme pallor, his gentleness, and his great courage. The principal feeling in her heart at that moment was an eager desire to hear the nature of the remembrance which the poor lover retained of her who had made him suffer so much. "M. de Bragelonne," she said, "that which your friends have refused to do, I will do for you, whom I like and esteem. I will be your friend. You hold your head high, as a man of honour should do; and I should regret that you should have to bow it down under ridicule, and in a few days, it may be, under contempt."—"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, perfectly livid. "Has it already gone so far?"

"If you do not know," said the princess, "I see that you guess; you were affianced, I believe, to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"—"Yes, Madame."—"By that right, then, you deserve to be warned about her, as some day or other I shall be obliged to dismiss her from my service—"—"Dismiss La Vallière!" cried Bragelonne.

"Of course! Do you suppose that I shall always be accessible to the tears and protestations of the king? No, no; my house shall no longer be made a convenience for such practices. But you tremble!"—"No, Madame, no," said Bragelonne, making an effort over himself. "I thought I should have died just now; that was all. Your royal Highness did me the honour to say that the king wept and implored you—"—"Yes; but in vain," returned the princess, who then related to Raoul the scene that took place at Chaillot, and the king's despair on his return. She told him of his indulgence to herself, and the terrible word with which the outraged princess, the humiliated coquette, had dashed aside the royal anger.

Digitized by Google

Raoul bowed his head. "What do you think of it all?" she said.—"The king loves her," he replied.—"But you seem to think she does not love him!"—"Alas, Madame, I still think of the time when she loved me."

Henrietta was for a moment struck with admiration at this sublime disbelief; and then, shrugging her shoulders, she said: "You do not believe me, I see. Oh, how deeply you love her! And you doubt if she loves the king?"—"Until I have proof. Pardon! I have her word, you see; and she is a noble child."—"You require a proof? Be it so! Come with me."

CHAPTER CXCII

A DOMICILIARY VISIT

THE princess, preceding Raoul, led him through the courtyard towards that part of the building which La Vallière inhabited; and ascending the same staircase which Raoul had himself ascended that very morning she paused at the door of the room in which the young man had been so strangely received by Montalais. The opportunity had been well chosen to carry out the project which Madame Henrietta had conceived, for the château was empty. The king, the courtiers, and the ladies of the court had set off for St. Germain; Madame Henrietta alone, aware of Bragelonne's return, and thinking over the advantages which might be drawn from this return, had feigned indisposition in order to remain behind. Madame was therefore confident of finding La Vallière's room and Saint-Aignan's apartment unoccupied. She took a pass-key from her pocket, and opened the door of her maid-of-honour's room. Bragelonne's gaze was immediately fixed upon the interior of the room, which he recognised at once; and the impression which the sight of it produced upon him was one of the first tortures that had awaited him. The princess looked at him, and her practised eye could at once detect what was passing in the young man's heart. "You asked me for proofs," she said; "do not be astonished, then, if I give you them. But if you do not think you have courage enough to confront them, there is still time to withdraw."

"I thank you, Madame," said Bragelonne; "but I came here to be convinced. You promised to convince me; do so."—

"Enter, then," said Madame, "and shut the door behind you."

Bragelonne obeyed, and then turned towards the princess, whom he interrogated by a look. "You know where you are, I suppose?" inquired Madame Henrietta.—"Everything leads me to believe that I am in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room."—"You are."

"But I would observe to your Highness that this room is a room, and is not a proof."—"Wait," said the princess, as she walked to the foot of the bed, folded up the screen into its several compartments, and stooped down towards the floor. "Look here," she continued; "stoop down, and lift up this trap-door."

"A trap-door!" said Raoul, astonished; for D'Artagnan's words recurred to his mind, and he remembered that D'Artagnan had made vague use of that word. He looked in vain for some cleft or crevice which might indicate an opening, or a ring to assist in lifting up some portion of the planking. "Ah! that is true," said Madame Henrietta, smiling; "I forgot the secret spring,—the fourth plank of the flooring. Press on the spot where you will observe a knot in the wood. Those are the instructions. Press, Viscount! press, I say, yourself!" Raoul, pale as death, pressed his finger on the spot which had been indicated to him; at the same moment the spring began to work, and the trap rose of its own accord.

"It is very ingenious, certainly," said the princess; "and one can see that the architect foresaw that it would be a small hand which would have to employ that device. See how easily the trap-door opens without assistance!"—"A staircase!" cried Raoul.—"Yes; and a very pretty one too," said Madame Henrietta. "See, Viscount, the staircase has a balustrade, intended to prevent the falling of timid persons, who might be tempted to descend; and I will risk myself on it accordingly. Come, Viscount, follow me!"

"But before following you, Madame, may I ask whither this staircase leads?"—"Ah! true; I forgot to tell you. You know, perhaps, that formerly M. de Saint-Aignan lived in the very next apartment to the king's?"—"Yes, Madame, I am aware of that,—that was the arrangement, at least, before I left; and more than once I have had the honour of visiting him in his old rooms."—"Well, he obtained the king's leave to change that convenient and beautiful apartment for the two rooms to which this staircase will conduct us, and which together form a lodging for him twice as small and at

Digitized by Google

ten times greater distance from the king,—a close proximity to whom is by no means disdained, in general, by the gentlemen belonging to the court."

"Very good, Madame," returned Raoul; "but go on, I beg, for I do not yet understand."—"Well, then, it accidentally happened," continued the princess, "that M. de Saint-Aignan's apartment is situated underneath the apartments of my maids of honour, and particularly underneath the room of La Vallière."—"But what was the motive of this trap-door and this staircase?"—"That I cannot tell you. Would you like to go down to M. de Saint-Aignan's rooms? Perhaps we shall there find the solution of the enigma."

Madame set the example by going down herself; and Raoul, sighing deeply, followed her. At every step Bragelonne took, he advanced farther into that mysterious apartment which had been witness to La Vallière's sighs, and still retained the sweetest perfume of her presence. Bragelonne fancied that he perceived, as he inhaled his every breath, that the young girl must have passed through there. Then succeeded to these emanations of herself, which he regarded as invisible though certain proofs, the flowers she preferred to all others, the books of her own selection. Had Raoul preserved a single doubt on the subject, it would have vanished at the secret harmony of tastes and disposition of the mind shown in the things of common use. La Vallière, in Bragelonne's eyes, was present there in every article of furniture, in the colour of the hangings, in everything that surrounded him. Dumb, and completely overwhelmed, there was nothing further for him now to learn, and he followed his pitiless conductress as blindly as the culprit follows the executioner. Madame, as cruel as all women of delicate and nervous temperaments are, did not spare him the slightest detail. But it must be admitted that notwithstanding the kind of apathy into which he had fallen, none of these details, even had he been left alone, would have escaped him. The happiness of the woman who loves, when that happiness is derived from a rival, is a torture for a jealous man; but for a jealous man such as Raoul was, for that heart which for the first time was steeped in gall and bitterness, Louise's happiness was in reality an ignominious death, a death of body and soul. He divined all,—their hands clasped in each other's, their faces drawn close together, and reflected, side by side, in loving proximity, as they gazed upon the mirrors around them,—so sweet an occupation for lovers, who, as they thus see themselves twice over, impress

Digitized by Google

the picture more enduringly in their memories. He divined the kiss unseen behind the heavy curtains falling free of their bands. He translated into feverish pains the eloquence of the couches hid in their shadow. That luxury, that studied elegance, full of intoxication; that extreme care to spare the loved object every annoyance or to occasion her a delightful surprise; that strength and power of love multiplied by the strength and power of royalty itself,—struck Raoul a mortal blow. Oh, if there be anything which can assuage the tortures of jealousy, it is the inferiority of the man who is preferred to yourself; while, on the very contrary, if there be a hell within hell, a torture without name in language, it is the almightiness of a god placed at the disposal of a rival, together with youth, beauty, and grace. In moments such as these, God himself seems to have taken part against the rejected lover.

One final pang was reserved for poor Raoul. Madame Henrietta lifted a silk curtain, and behind the curtain he perceived La Vallière's portrait. Not only the portrait of La Vallière, but of La Vallière eloquent of youth, beauty, and happiness, inhaling life and enjoyment at every pore, because at eighteen years of age love itself is life. "Louise!" murmured Bragelonne, "Louise! is it true, then? Oh, you have never loved me, for never have you looked at me in that manner!" and he felt as if his heart were crushed within his bosom.

Madame Henrietta looked at him, almost envious of his extreme grief, although she well knew there was nothing to envy in it, and that she herself was as passionately loved by De Guiche as Louise by Bragelonne. Raoul interpreted Madame Henrietta's look. "Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Madame! In your presence I know I ought to have greater mastery over myself. But may the Lord God of heaven and of earth grant that you may never be struck by the blow which crushes me at this moment; for you are but a woman, and would not be able to endure so terrible an affliction. Forgive me! I am but a poor gentleman, while you belong to the race of the happy, of the all-powerful, of the elect—"

"M. de Bragelonne," replied Henrietta, "a heart such as yours merits all the consideration and respect which a queen's heart even can bestow. I am your friend, Monsieur; and as such, indeed, I would not allow your whole life to be poisoned by perfidy and covered with ridicule. It was I, indeed, who with more courage than any of your pretended friends—I except M. de Guiche,—was the cause of your return from London; it

is I, also, who have given you these melancholy proofs,—necessary however for your cure, if you are a lover with courage in his heart, and not a weeping Amadis. Do not thank me; pity me even, and do not serve the king less faithfully than you have done." Raoul smiled bitterly. "Ah! true, true; I was forgetting that! The king is my master."

"Your liberty, nay, your very life, is at stake." A steady, penetrating look informed Madame Henrietta that she was mistaken, and that her last argument was not likely to affect the young man. "Take care, M. de Bragelonne," she said; "for if you do not weigh well all your actions, you might throw into an extravagance of wrath a prince whose passions, once aroused, exceed the limits of reason, and you would thereby involve your friends and family in distress. You must bend; you must submit, and must cure yourself."

"I thank you, Madame. I appreciate the advice your royal Highness is good enough to give me, and I will endeavour to follow it; but one final word, I beg."—"Name it."—"Should I be indiscreet in asking you the secret of this staircase, of this trap-door,—a secret which you have discovered?"

"Oh, nothing is more simple! For the purpose of exercising a surveillance over the young girls who are attached to my service, I have duplicate keys of their doors. It seemed very strange to me that M. de Saint-Aignan should change his apartments; it seemed very strange that the king should come to see M. de Saint-Aignan every day; and finally, it seemed very strange that so many things should be done during your absence,—that the very habits and customs of the court seemed to be changed. I do not wish to be trifled with by the king, nor to serve as a cloak for his love-affairs; for after La Vallière, who weeps, he will take a fancy to Montalais, who laughs, and then to Tonnay-Charente, who sings. To act such a part as that would be unworthy of me. I have thrust aside the scruples which my friendship for you suggested. I have discovered the secret. I have wounded your feelings, I know, and I again entreat you to excuse me; but I had a duty to fulfil. I have discharged it. You are now forewarned. The tempest will soon burst; protect yourself."

"You naturally expect, however, that a result of some kind must follow," replied Bragelonne, with firmness; "for you do not suppose I shall silently accept the shame which is thrust upon me, or the treachery which has been practised against me?"—"You will take whatever steps in the matter you please,

M. Raoul; only, do not betray the source whence you derived the truth. That is all I have to ask; that is the only price I require for the service I have rendered you."—"Fear nothing, Madame!" said Bragelonne, with a bitter smile.

"I bribed the locksmith in whom the lovers had confided. You can just as well do so as myself, can you not?"—"Yes, Madame. Your royal Highness, however, has no other advice or caution to give me, except that of not betraying you?"—"None other."

"I am, therefore, about to beg your royal Highness to allow me to remain here for one moment."—"Without me?"—"Oh, no, Madame! It matters very little, for what I have to do can be done in your presence. I only ask one moment to write a line to some one."—"It is dangerous, M. de Bragelonne. Take care!"—"No one can possibly know that your royal Highness has done me the honour to conduct me here. Besides, I shall sign the letter I am going to write."—"Do as you please, then."

Raoul drew out his tablet, and wrote rapidly on one of the leaves the following words:—

"MONSIEUR THE COUNT,—Do not be surprised to find here this paper signed by me. The friend whom I shall very shortly send to call on you will have the honour to explain the object of my visit to you. VICOMTE RAOUL DE BRAGELONNE."

Rolling up the paper, and slipping it into the lock of the door which communicated with the room set apart for the two lovers, Raoul satisfied himself that the paper was so apparent that De Saint-Aignan could not but see it as he entered; then he rejoined the princess, who had already reached the top of the staircase. They then separated,—Raoul pretending to thank her Highness; Henrietta pitying, or seeming to pity, with all her heart the unhappy man she had just condemned to so fearful torture. "Oh," she said, as she saw him disappear, pale as death, his eyes injected with blood, "if I had known this, I should have concealed the truth from that poor young man!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CXCIII

PORTHOS'S PLAN OF ACTION

THE multiplicity of the personages we have introduced into this long history compels that each shall appear only in his own turn and according to the exigencies of the recital. The result is that our readers have had no opportunity of again meeting our friend Porthos since his return from Fontainebleau. The honours which he had received from the king had not changed the tranquil, affectionate character of that worthy man; only, he held up his head a little higher than usual, and a majesty of demeanour as it were betrayed itself, since the honour of dining at the king's table had been accorded him.

His Majesty's banqueting-room had produced a certain effect upon Porthos. Le Seigneur de Bracieux et de Pierrefonds delighted to remember that during that memorable dinner the numerous array of servants and the large number of officials who were in attendance upon the guests gave a certain tone and effect to the repast, and seemed to furnish the room. Porthos proposed to confer upon Mouston a position of some kind or other, in order to establish a sort of hierarchy among his domestics, and to create a military household,—which was not unusual among the great captains of the age, since in the preceding century this luxury had been greatly encouraged by Messieurs de Tréville, de Schomberg, de la Vieuville, without alluding to Messieurs de Richelieu, de Condé, and de Bouillon-Turenne. And, therefore, why should not he,—Porthos, the friend of the king and of M. Fouquet, a baron, an engineer, etc., —why should not he indeed enjoy all the delightful privileges attached to large possessions and great merit? Somewhat neglected by Aramis, who we know was greatly occupied with M. Fouquet; neglected also, on account of his being on duty, by D'Artagnan; tired of Trüchen and Planchet,—Porthos was surprised to find himself dreaming, without precisely knowing why; but if any one had said to him, "Do you want anything, Porthos?" he would most certainly have replied, "Yes."

After one of those dinners, during which Porthos attempted to recall to his mind all the details of the royal banquet,—half joyful, thanks to the excellence of the wines; half melancholy, thanks to his ambitious ideas,—Porthos was gradually falling

Digitized by Google

off into a gentle doze, when his servant entered to announce that M. de Bragelonne wished to speak to him: Porthos passed into an adjoining room, where he found his young friend in the disposition of mind of which we are already aware. Raoul advanced towards Porthos, and shook him by the hand. Porthos, surprised at his seriousness of aspect, offered him a seat.

"Dear M. du Vallon," said Raoul, "I have a service to ask of you."—"Nothing could happen more fortunately, my young friend," replied Porthos. "I have had eight thousand livres sent me this morning from Pierrefonds; and if you want any money—"—"No, I thank you; it is not money."—"So much the worse, then. I have always heard it said that that is the rarest service, but the easiest to render. The remark struck me; I like to cite remarks that strike me."—"Your heart is as good as your mind is sound and true."

"You are too kind, I'm sure. Will you have your dinner immediately?"—"No; I am not hungry."—"Eh! What a dreadful country England is!"—"Not too much so; but—"—"Well, if such excellent fish and meat were not to be procured there, it would hardly be endurable."

"Yes. I have come—"—"I am listening. Only allow me to take something to drink. One gets thirsty in Paris!" and Porthos ordered a bottle of champagne to be brought. Then, having first filled Raoul's glass, he filled his own, took a large draught, and resumed: "I needed that, in order to listen to you with proper attention. I am now quite at your service. What have you to ask me, dear Raoul? What do you want?"—"Give me your opinion upon quarrels in general, my dear friend."—"My opinion? Well—but— Explain your idea a little," replied Porthos, rubbing his forehead.

"I mean,—are you generally of accommodating disposition whenever any misunderstanding arises between a friend of yours and a stranger, for instance?"—"Oh! of excellent disposition, as always."—"Very good; but what do you do in such a case?"—"Whenever any friend of mine has a quarrel, I always act upon one principle."—"What is that?"—"That all lost time is irreparable, and that one never arranges an affair so well as when the dispute is still warm."

"Ah; indeed, that is your principle?"—"Thoroughly; so, as soon as a quarrel takes place, I bring the two parties together."—"Exactly."—"You understand that by this means it is impossible for an affair not to be arranged."

"I should have thought," said Raoul, with astonishment,

"that, treated in this manner, an affair would, on the contrary—"—"Oh, not the least in the world! Just fancy now! I have had in my life something like a hundred and eighty to a hundred and ninety regular duels, without reckoning hasty encounters or chance meetings."—"It is a very handsome number," said Raoul, unable to resist a smile.—"A mere nothing; but I am so gentle. D'Artagnan reckons his duels by hundreds. It is very true he is a little too hard and sharp,—I have often told him so."

"And so," resumed Raoul, "you generally arrange the affairs of honour your friends confide to you."—"There is not a single instance in which I have not finished by arranging every one of them," said Porthos, with a gentleness and confidence which surprised Raoul.

"But the way in which you settle them is at least honourable, I suppose?"—"Oh, rely upon that! And at this stage I will explain my other principle to you. As soon as my friend has confided his quarrel to me, this is what I do: I go to his adversary at once, armed with a politeness and self-possession which are absolutely requisite under such circumstances."—"That is the way, then," said Raoul, bitterly, "that you arrange the affairs so safely."—"I believe you. I go to the adversary, then, and say to him, 'It is impossible, Monsieur, that you are ignorant of the extent to which you have insulted my friend.'"

Raoul frowned at this remark. "It sometimes happens,—very often indeed," pursued Porthos,—"that my friend has not been insulted at all; he has even been the first to give offence. You can imagine, therefore, whether my language is not well chosen;" and Porthos burst into a peal of laughter. "Decidedly," said Raoul to himself, while the formidable thunder of Porthos's laughter was ringing in his ears, "I am very unfortunate. De Guiche treats me with coldness, D'Artagnan with ridicule, Porthos is too tame; no one is ready to 'arrange' this affair in my way. And I came to Porthos because I wished to find a sword instead of cold reasoning. Ah, what wretched luck!"

Porthos, who had recovered himself, continued: "By a simple expression, I leave my adversary without an excuse."—"That is as it may happen," said Raoul, indifferently.

"Not at all; it is quite certain. I have not left him an excuse; and then it is that I display all my courtesy, in order to attain the happy issue of my project. I advance, therefore, with an air of great politeness, and taking my adversary by the

hand—"—"Oh!" said Raoul, impatiently.—"'Monsieur,' I say to him, 'now that you are convinced of having given the offence, we are sure of reparation; between my friend and yourself the future can offer only an exchange of gracious ceremonies. Consequently, I am instructed to give you the length of my friend's sword—"—"What!" said Raoul.—"Wait a minute!—"the length of my friend's sword. My horse is waiting below; my friend is in such and such a spot, and is impatiently awaiting your agreeable society. I will take you with me; we can call upon your second as we go along. The affair is arranged.'"

"And so," said Raoul, pale with vexation, "you reconcile the two adversaries on the ground."—"I beg your pardon," interrupted Porthos. "Reconcile? What for?"—"You said that the affair was arranged."—"Of course! since my friend is waiting for him."—"Well, what then? If he is waiting—"—"Well, if he is waiting, it is merely to stretch his legs a little; the adversary, on the contrary, is stiff from riding. They place themselves in proper order, and my friend kills his opponent; the affair is ended."

"Ah! he kills him?" cried Raoul.—"I should think so," said Porthos. "Is it likely I should ever have as a friend a man who allows himself to get killed? I have a hundred and one friends; at the head of the list stand your father, Aramis, and D'Artagnan,—all of whom are living and well, I believe."—"Oh, my dear Baron!" exclaimed Raoul, delightedly, as he embraced Porthos.

"You approve of my method, then?" said the giant.—"I approve of it so thoroughly that I shall have recourse to it this very day, without a moment's delay,—at once, in fact. You are the very man I have been looking for."

"Good! Here I am, then. You want to fight?"—"Absolutely so."—"It is very natural. With whom?"—"With M. de Saint-Aignan."

"I know him,—a most agreeable man, who was exceedingly polite to me the day I had the honour of dining with the king. I shall certainly return his politeness, even if that were not my usual custom. So, he has given you offence?"—"A mortal offence."—"The devil! I can say 'mortal offence'?"—"More than that, even, if you like."—"That is very convenient."—"I may look upon it as all arranged, may I not?" said Raoul, smiling.—"As a matter of course. Where will you be waiting for him?"

"Ah! I forgot. It is a very delicate matter. M. de Saint-

Aignan is a great friend of the king."—"So I have heard it said."—"So that if I kill him—"—"Oh, you will kill him certainly; you must take every precaution to do so! But there is no difficulty in these matters now; if you had lived in our early days,—oh, that was something like!"

"My dear friend, you have not quite understood me. I mean that M. de Saint-Aignan being a friend of the king, the affair will be more difficult to manage, since the king might learn beforehand—"—"Oh, no; that is not likely. You know my method: 'Monsieur, you have injured my friend, and—'"—"Yes, I know it."—"And then: 'Monsieur, I have horses below.' I carry him off before he can have spoken to any one."

"Will he allow himself, think you, to be carried off like that?"—"I should think so! I should like to see it fail! It would be the first time, if it did. It is true, though, that the young men of the present day— Bah! I would carry him off bodily, if it were necessary;" and Porthos, adding gesture to speech, lifted Raoul and his chair.

"Very good," said Raoul, laughing. "All we have to do is to state the grounds of the quarrel to M. de Saint-Aignan."—"Well, but that is done, it seems."—"No, my dear M. du Vallon, the usage of the present day requires that the cause of the quarrel should be explained."—"By your new method, yes. Well, then, tell me what it is—"

"The fact is—"—"Deuce take it! See how troublesome this is! In former days we never had any occasion to talk. People fought then for the sake of fighting; and I, for one, know no better reason than that."—"You are quite right, my friend."—"However, tell me what the cause is."—"It is too long a story to tell; only, as one must particularise to some extent—"—"Yes, yes, the devil!—with the new method."

"As it is necessary, I said, to be specific, and as on the other hand the affair is full of difficulties and requires the most absolute secrecy—"—"Oh! oh!"—"You will have the kindness merely to tell M. de Saint-Aignan that he has insulted me,—in the first place, by changing his lodgings."

"By changing his lodgings? Good!" said Porthos, who began to count on his fingers; "next?"—"Then, in getting a trap-door made in his new apartments."—"I understand," said Porthos; "a trap-door! Upon my word, this is very serious; you ought to be furious at that. What the deuce does the fellow mean by getting trap-doors made without first consulting you?

Trap-doors! *Mordioux!* I haven't any, except in my dungeons at Bracieux."

"And you will add," said Raoul, "that my last motive for considering myself insulted is the portrait that M. de Saint-Aignan well knows."—"Is it possible? A portrait too! A change of residence, a trap-door, and a portrait! Why, my dear friend, with but one of those causes of complaint there is enough, and more than enough, for all the gentlemen in France and Spain to cut one another's throats; and that is saying but very little."

"Well, my dear friend, you are furnished with all you need, I suppose?"—"I shall take a second horse with me. Select your own rendezvous; and while you are waiting there you can practise some of the best passes, so as to get your limbs as elastic as possible."—"Thank you. I shall be waiting for you in the wood of Vincennes, close to Minimes."—"All's right, then. Where am I to find this M. de Saint-Aignan?"—"At the Palais-Royal."

Porthos rang a huge hand-bell. "My court suit," he said to the servant who answered the summons, "my horse, and a led horse to accompany me." Then turning to Raoul as soon as the servant had quitted the room, he said, "Does your father know anything about this?"—"No; I am going to write to him."—"And D'Artagnan?"—"No, nor D'Artagnan, either. He is very cautious, you know, and might have diverted me from my purpose."—"D'Artagnan is a sound adviser, though," said Porthos, astonished that in his own loyal faith in D'Artagnan any one could have thought of himself so long as there was a D'Artagnan in the world.

"Dear M. du Vallon," replied Raoul, "do not question me any more, I implore you. I have told you all that I had to say; it is prompt action that I now expect, as sharp and decided as you know how to arrange it. That, indeed, is my reason for having chosen you."—"You will be satisfied with me," replied Porthos.

"Do not forget, either, that except ourselves no one must know anything of this meeting."—"People always find these things out," said Porthos, "when a dead body is discovered in a wood. But I promise you everything, my dear friend, except concealing the dead body. There it is; and it must be seen, as a matter of course. It is a principle of mine not to bury bodies. That has a smack of the assassin about it. Every risk must take its risk, as they say in Normandy."

Digitized by Google

"To work, then, my dear friend!"—"Rely upon me," said the giant, finishing the bottle, while the servant spread out upon a sofa the gorgeously decorated dress trimmed with lace. Raoul left the room, saying to himself with a secret delight: "Perfidious king! traitorous monarch! I cannot reach thee. I do not wish it; for the person of a king is sacred. But your accomplice, your panderer,—the coward who represents you,—shall pay for your crime. I will kill him in thy name, and afterwards we will think of Louise."

CHAPTER CXCIV

THE CHANGE OF RESIDENCE, THE TRAP-DOOR, AND THE PORTRAIT

PORTHOS, to his great delight entrusted with this mission, which made him feel young again, took half an hour less than his usual time to put on his court suit. To show that he was a man acquainted with the usages of the highest society, he had begun by sending his lackey to inquire if M. de Saint-Aignan were at home, and received, in answer, that M. le Comte de Saint-Aignan had had the honour of accompanying the king to St. Germain, as well as the whole court, but that Monsieur the Count had just at that moment returned. Immediately upon this reply, Porthos made haste, and reached De Saint-Aignan's apartments just as the latter was having his boots taken off.

The expedition had been delightful. The king, who was in love more than ever and of course happier than ever, had behaved in the most charming manner to every one. Nothing could possibly equal his kindness. M. de Saint-Aignan, it may be remembered, was a poet, and fancied that he had proved that he was so under too many memorable circumstances to allow the title to be disputed by any one. An indefatigable rhymester, he had during the whole of the journey overwhelmed with quatrains, sextains, and madrigals, first the king, and then La Vallière. The king was, on his side, in a similarly poetical mood, and had made a distich; while La Vallière, like all women who are in love, had composed two sonnets. As one may see, the day had not been a bad one for Apollo; and therefore, as soon as he had returned to Paris, De Saint-Aignan, who knew beforehand that his verses would be extensively circulated

in court circles, occupied himself, with a little more attention than he had been able to bestow during the excursion, with the composition as well as with the idea itself. Consequently, with all the tenderness of a father about to start his children in life, he candidly asked himself whether the public would find these fruits of his imagination sufficiently elegant and graceful; and in order to make his mind easy on the subject, M. de Saint-Aignan recited to himself the madrigal he had composed, and which he had repeated from memory to the king, and which he had promised to write out for him on his return,—

"'Iris, vos yeux malins ne disent pas toujours
Ce que votre pensée à votre cœur confie;
Iris, pourquoi faut-il que je passe ma vie
A plus aimer vos yeux qui m'ont joué ces tours?'"

This madrigal, graceful as it was, failed to satisfy De Saint-Aignan when it had passed from oral delivery to the written form of poetry. Many had thought it charming,—its author first of all; but on second view it was not so pleasing. So De Saint-Aignan, sitting at his table, with one leg crossed over the other, and rubbing his brow, repeated,—

"'Iris, vos yeux malins ne disent pas toujours—'

Oh! as to that, now," he murmured, "that is irreproachable. I might even add that it is somewhat in the manner of Ronsard or Malherbe, which makes me proud. Unhappily, it is not so with the second line. There is good reason for the saying that the easiest line to make is the first." And he continued:—

"'Ce que votre pensée à votre cœur confie—'

Ah, there is the 'thought' confiding in the 'heart'! Why should not the heart confide with as good reason in the thought? In faith, for my part, I see nothing to hinder. Where the devil have I been, to bring together these two hemistiches? Now, the third is good,—

'Iris, pourquoi faut-il que je passe ma vie—'

although the rhyme is not strong,—*vie* and *confie*. My faith! the Abbé Boyer, who is a great poet, has, like me, made a rhyme of *vie* and *confie* in the tragedy of *Oropaste, or the False Tonaxare;* without reckoning that M. Corneille did not scruple to do so in his tragedy of *Sophonisbe*. Good, then, for *vie* and *confie!* Yes; but the line is impertinent. I remember now that the king bit his nail at that moment. In fact, it gives him the appearance of saying to Mademoiselle de la

Vallière, 'How does it happen that I am captivated by you?' It would have been better, I think, to say,—

'Que bénis soient les dieux qui condamnent ma vie—'

Condamnent! ah! well, yes, there is a compliment!—the king condemned to La Vallière—no!" Then he repeated:—

"'Mais bénis soient les dieux qui—destinent ma vie.'

Not bad, although *destinent ma vie* is weak; but, good heavens! everything can't be strong in a quatrain. *A plus aimer vos yeux,*—in loving more whom, what? Obscurity. But obscurity is nothing; since La Vallière and the king have understood me, every one will understand me. Yes; but here is something melancholy,—the last hemistich: *qui m'ont joué ces tours.* The plural necessitated by the rhyme! And then to call the modesty of La Vallière a trick,—that is not happy! I shall be a byword to all my quill-driving acquaintances. They will say that my poems are verses in the grand-seigneur style; and if the king hears it said that I am a bad poet, he will take it into his head to believe it."

While confiding these words to his heart and engaging his heart in these thoughts, the count was undressing himself. He had just taken off his coat, and was putting on his dressing-gown, when he was informed that M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds was waiting to be received. "Eh!" he said, "what does that bunch of names mean? I don't know him."—"It is the same gentleman," replied the lackey, "who had the honour of dining with you, Monseigneur, at the king's table, when his Majesty was staying at Fontainebleau."—"With the king, at Fontainebleau?" cried De Saint-Aignan. "Eh! quick, quick! introduce that gentleman."

The lackey hastened to obey. Porthos entered. M. de Saint-Aignan had an excellent recollection of persons, and at the first glance he recognised the gentleman from the country who enjoyed so singular a reputation, and whom the king had received so favourably at Fontainebleau, in spite of the smiles of some of those who were present. He therefore advanced towards Porthos with all outward signs of good-will, which Porthos thought but natural, considering that he himself, whenever he called upon an adversary, hoisted the standard of the most refined politeness. De Saint-Aignan desired the servant to give Porthos a chair; and the latter, who saw nothing unusual in this act of politeness, sat down gravely, and coughed.

The ordinary courtesies having been exchanged between the

Digitized by Google

two gentlemen, the count, since to him the visit was paid, said, "May I ask, Monsieur the Baron, to what happy circumstance I owe the favour of your visit?"—"The very thing I am about to have the honour of explaining to you, Monsieur the Count; but, I beg your pardon—"—"What is the matter, Monsieur?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.—"I regret to say that I have broken your chair."

"Not at all, Monsieur," said De Saint-Aignan; "not at all."—"It is the fact, though, Monsieur the Count; I have broken it,—so much so, indeed, that if I remain in it I shall fall down, which would be an exceedingly disagreeable position for me in the discharge of the very serious mission which has been entrusted to me with regard to yourself."

Porthos rose; and but just in time, for the chair had given way several inches. De Saint-Aignan looked about him for something more solid for his guest to sit upon. "Modern articles of furniture," said Porthos, while the count was looking about, "are constructed in a ridiculously light manner. In my early days, when I used to sit down with far more energy than now, I do not remember ever to have broken a chair, except in taverns, with my arms." De Saint-Aignan smiled at this remark. "But," said Porthos, as he settled himself on a couch, which creaked but did not give way beneath his weight, "that unfortunately has nothing whatever to do with my present visit."

"Why unfortunately? Are you the bearer of a message of ill-omen, Monsieur the Baron?"—"Of ill-omen,—for a gentleman? Certainly not, Monsieur the Count," replied Porthos, nobly. "I have simply come to say that you have seriously offended a friend of mine."—"I, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan,—"I have offended a friend of yours, do you say? May I ask his name?"—"M. Raoul de Bragelonne."

"I have offended M. Raoul de Bragelonne!" cried De Saint-Aignan. "I really assure you, Monsieur, that it is quite impossible; for M. de Bragelonne, whom I know but very slightly,—nay, whom I know hardly at all,—is in England; and as I have not seen him for a long time past, I cannot possibly have offended him."—"M. de Bragelonne is in Paris, Monsieur the Count," said Porthos, perfectly unmoved; "and I repeat it is quite certain you have offended him, since he himself told me you had. Yes, Monsieur, your have seriously offended him, mortally offended him, I repeat."—"It is impossible, Monsieur the Baron, I swear,—quite impossible."

Digitized by Google

"Besides," added Porthos, "you cannot be ignorant of the circumstance, since M. de Bragelonne informed me that he had already apprised you of it by a note."—"I give you my word of honour, Monsieur, that I have received no note whatever."—"This is most extraordinary," replied Porthos.

"I will convince you," said De Saint-Aignan, "that I have received nothing in any way from him;" and he rang the bell. "Basque," he said, to the servant who entered, "how many letters or notes were sent here during my absence?"—"Three, Monsieur the Count,—a note from M. de Fiesque, one from Madame de Laferté, and a letter from M. de las Fuentès."—"Is that all?"—"Yes, Monsieur the Count."

"Speak the truth before this gentleman,—the truth, you understand! I will take care you are not blamed."—"There was a note, also, from—from—"—"Well, from whom?"—"From Mademoiselle de la Val—"—"That is quite sufficient," interrupted Porthos. "I believe you, Monsieur the Count."

De Saint-Aignan dismissed the valet, and followed him to the door in order to close it after him; and when he had done so, looking straight before him, he happened to see in the keyhole of the adjoining apartment the paper which Bragelonne had slipped in there as he left. "What is this?" he said. Porthos, who was sitting with his back to the room, turned round. "Oh! oh!" he said.—"A note in the keyhole!" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan.—"That is not unlikely to be the one we want, Monsieur the Count," said Porthos.

De Saint-Aignan took out the paper. "A note from M. de Bragelonne!" he exclaimed.—"You see, Monsieur, I was right. Oh, when I say a thing—"—"Brought here by M. de Bragelonne himself," the count murmured, turning pale. "This is infamous! How could he possibly have come here?" and the count rang again.

"Who has been here during my absence with the king?"—"No one, Monsieur."—"That is impossible. Some one must have been here."—"No one could possibly have entered, Monsieur; since I kept the keys in my own pocket."—"And yet I find this letter in that lock yonder. Some one must have put it there; it could not have come alone."

Basque opened his arms, as if signifying the most absolute ignorance on the subject. "Probably it was M. de Bragelonne himself who placed it there," said Porthos.

"In that case he must have entered here."—"Without doubt, Monsieur."—"How could that have been, since I have

Digitized by Google

the key in my own pocket? " returned Basque, perseveringly. De Saint-Aignan crumpled up the letter in his hand, after having read it. " There is something mysterious about this," he murmured, absorbed in thought. Porthos left him to his reflections; but after a while returned to the mission he had undertaken. " Shall we return to our little affair? " he said, addressing De Saint-Aignan, as soon as the lackey had disappeared.

" I think I can now understand it, from this note which has arrived here in so singular a manner. M. de Bragelonne says that a friend will call."—" I am his friend, and am the one he alludes to."—" For the purpose of giving me a challenge? "—" Precisely."—" And he complains that I have offended him? "—" Mortally so."—" In what way, may I ask?—for his conduct is so mysterious that it at least needs some explanation."

" Monsieur," replied Porthos, " my friend cannot but be right; and so far as his conduct is concerned, if it be mysterious, as you say, you have only yourself to blame for it." Porthos pronounced these words with an amount of confidence which for a man who was unaccustomed to his ways must have indicated an infinity of sense. " Mystery? Be it so; but what is the mystery about? " said De Saint-Aignan.

" You will think it best, perhaps," Porthos replied, with a low bow, " that I do not enter into particulars, and for excellent reasons."—" Oh, I perfectly understand you! We will touch very lightly upon it, then. So speak, Monsieur; I am listening."—" In the first place, Monsieur," said Porthos, " you have changed your apartments."—" Yes, that is quite true," said De Saint-Aignan.

" You admit it, then," said Porthos, with an air of satisfaction.—" Admit it! of course I admit it. Why should I not admit it, do you suppose? "—" You have admitted it. Very good," said Porthos, lifting up one finger.

" But how can my having moved my lodgings have done M. de Bragelonne any harm? Have the goodness to tell me that, for I positively do not comprehend a word of what you are saying." Porthos stopped him, and then said with great gravity: " Monsieur, this is the first of M. de Bragelonne's complaints against you. If he makes a complaint, it is because he feels himself insulted." De Saint-Aignan began to beat his foot impatiently on the floor. " This looks like a bad quarrel," he said.

" No one can possibly have a bad quarrel with the Vicomte

de Bragelonne," returned Porthos; "but, at all events, you have nothing to add on the subject of your changing your apartments, I suppose?"—"Nothing. And what is the next point?"—"Ah, the next! You will observe, Monsieur, that the one I have already mentioned is a most serious injury to which you have given no answer, or rather have answered very indifferently. So, Monsieur, you change your lodgings; that offends M. de Bragelonne, and you do not attempt to excuse yourself? Very well!"

"What!" cried De Saint-Aignan, who was irritated by the coolness of his visitor,—"what! Am I to consult M. de Bragelonne whether I am to move or not? You can hardly be serious, Monsieur."—"Absolutely necessary, Monsieur; but, under any circumstances, you will admit that it is nothing in comparison with the second ground of complaint."—"Well, what is that?" Porthos assumed a very serious expression as he said, "How about the trap-door, Monsieur?"

De Saint-Aignan turned exceedingly pale. He pushed back his chair so abruptly that Porthos, simple as he was, perceived that the blow had told. "The trap-door?" murmured De Saint-Aignan.—"Yes, Monsieur, explain that if you can," said Porthos, shaking his head.

De Saint-Aignan held down his head. "Oh, I have been betrayed," he murmured; "everything is known!"—"Everything," replied Porthos, who knew nothing.

"You see me overwhelmed," pursued De Saint-Aignan,—"overwhelmed to such a degree that I hardly know what I am about."—"A guilty conscience, Monsieur! Your affair is a bad one."—"Monsieur!"—"And when the public shall learn all about it, and will judge—"—"Oh, Monsieur!" exclaimed the count, hurriedly, "such a secret ought not to be known, even by one's confessor!"—"That we will think about," said Porthos; "the secret will not go far, in fact."

"But, Monsieur," returned De Saint-Aignan, "is M. de Bragelonne, in penetrating the secret, aware of the danger to which he exposes himself and others?"—"M. de Bragelonne incurs no danger, Monsieur, nor does he fear any either,—as you, if it please Heaven, will find out very soon."

"This fellow is a perfect madman," thought De Saint-Aignan. "What, in Heaven's name, does he want?" He then said aloud: "Come, Monsieur, let us hush up this affair."—"You forget the portrait!" said Porthos, in a voice of thunder, which made the count's blood freeze in his veins.

Digitized by Google

As the portrait in question was La Vallière's portrait, and as no mistake could any longer exist on the subject, De Saint-Aignan's eyes were completely opened. "Ah," he exclaimed, —"ah, Monsieur, I remember now that M. de Bragelonne was engaged to be married to her." Porthos assumed an imposing air—all the majesty of ignorance, in fact—as he said: "It matters nothing whatever to me, nor to yourself indeed, whether or not my friend was, as you say, engaged to be married. I am even astonished that you should have made use of so indiscreet a remark. It may possibly do your cause harm, Monsieur."

"Monsieur," replied De Saint-Aignan, "you are the incarnation of intelligence, delicacy, and loyalty of feeling united. I see the whole matter now clearly enough."—"So much the better," said Porthos.—"And," pursued De Saint-Aignan, "you have made me comprehend it in the most ingenious and the most delicate manner possible. Thank you, Monsieur, thank you." Porthos drew himself up. "Only, now that I know everything, permit me to explain—" Porthos shook his head as a man who does not wish to hear; but De Saint-Aignan continued: "I am in despair, I assure you, at all that has happened; but how would you have acted in my place? Come, between ourselves, tell me what would you have done?"

Porthos raised his head. "There is no question at all of what I should have done, young man; you have now," he said, "been made acquainted with the three causes of complaint against you, I believe?"

"As for the first, my change of rooms,—and I now address myself to you, as a man of honour and of great intelligence,—could I, when the desire of so august a personage was so urgently expressed that I should move, ought I to have disobeyed?" Porthos was about to speak, but De Saint-Aignan did not give him time to answer. "Ah! my frankness, I see, convinces you," he said, interpreting the movement in his own interest. "You perceive that I am right?"

Porthos did not reply. De Saint-Aignan continued: "I pass to that unfortunate trap-door," placing his hand on Porthos's arm,—"that trap-door, the occasion and the means of so much unhappiness, and which was constructed for—you know what. Well, then, in plain truth, do you suppose that it was I who, of my own accord, in such a place too, had that trap-door made? Oh, no! you do not believe it; and here, again, you feel, you guess, you understand the influence of a will superior to my own. You can conceive the infatuation,—I do not speak of love, that

madness irresistible! But, thank Heaven! happily the affair is with a man who has so much sensitiveness of feeling. If it were not so, indeed, what an amount of misery and scandal would fall upon her, poor girl! and upon him—whom I will not name."

Porthos, confused and bewildered by the eloquence and gestures of De Saint-Aignan, made a thousand efforts to stem this torrent of words, of which, by the by, he did not understand a single one; he remained upright and motionless on his seat, and that was all he could do. De Saint-Aignan continued, and gave a new inflection to his voice, and an increasing vehemence to his gesture: "As for the portrait,—for I readily believe the portrait is the principal cause of complaint,—tell me candidly if you think me to blame? Who was it that wished to have her portrait? Was it I? Who is in love with her? Is it I? Who desires her? who has won her? Is it I? No, a thousand times no! I know M. de Bragelonne must be in a state of despair; I know these misfortunes are most cruel. But I, too, am suffering as well; and yet there is no possibility of offering any resistance. If he struggles, he will be derided; if he resists, he is lost. You will tell me, I know, that despair is madness; but you are reasonable,—you have understood me. I perceive by your serious, thoughtful, embarrassed air, even, that the importance of the situation in which we are placed has not escaped you. Return, therefore, to M. de Bragelonne; thank him—as I have indeed reason to thank him—for having chosen as an intermediary a man of your merit. Believe me that I shall, on my side, preserve an eternal gratitude for the man who has so ingeniously, so cleverly corrected the misunderstanding between us. And since ill-luck would have it that the secret should be known to four instead of to three, why, this secret, which might make the most ambitious man's fortune, I am delighted to share with you, Monsieur; from the bottom of my heart I am delighted at it. From this very moment you can make use of me as you please; I place myself entirely at your mercy. What can I possibly do for you? What can I solicit, nay, require even? Speak, Monsieur, speak!"

According to the familiarly friendly fashion of that period, De Saint-Aignan threw his arms round Porthos, and clasped him tenderly in his embrace. Porthos allowed him to do this with the most complete indifference. "Speak!" resumed De Saint-Aignan; "what do you require?"

"Monsieur," said Porthos, "I have a horse below; be good enough to mount him. He is a very good one, and will play you

Digitized by Google

no tricks."—"Mount on horseback! What for?" inquired De Saint-Aignan, with no little curiosity.—"To accompany me where M. de Bragelonne is awaiting us."

"Ah! he wishes to speak to me, I suppose? I can well believe that; he wishes to have the details, very likely. Alas! it is a very delicate matter; but at the present moment I cannot, for the king is waiting for me."—"The king will wait," said Porthos.

"But where is M. de Bragelonne expecting me?"—"At the Minimes, at Vincennes."—"Ah, indeed! but are we going to laugh over the affair when we get there?"—"I don't think it likely,—not I, at least;" and the face of Porthos assumed a stern hardness of expression. "The Minimes is a rendezvous for duels."—"Very well; what, then, have I to do at the Minimes?" Porthos slowly drew his sword, and said, "That is the length of my friend's sword."—"Why, the man is mad!" cried De Saint-Aignan.

The colour mounted to Porthos's face, as he replied: "If I had not the honour of being in your own apartment, Monsieur, and of representing M. de Bragelonne's interests, I would throw you out of the window. It will be merely a pleasure postponed, and you will lose nothing by waiting. Will you come to the Minimes, Monsieur?"—"Eh!"—"Will you go thither of your own free will?"—"But—"—"I will carry you if you do not come. Take care!"

"Basque!" cried M. de Saint-Aignan. As soon as Basque appeared, he said, "The king wishes to see Monsieur the Count."—"That is very different," said Porthos; "the king's service before everything else. We will wait there until this evening, Monsieur." And saluting De Saint-Aignan with his usual courtesy, Porthos left the room, delighted at having arranged another affair. De Saint-Aignan looked after him as he left; and then hastily putting on his coat again, he ran off, arranging his dress as he went along, muttering to himself: "The Minimes! the Minimes! We will see how the king will like this challenge; for it is for him, after all, *pardieu!*"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CXCV

RIVAL POLITICS

On his return from the ride which had been so prolific in poetical effusions, and in which every one had paid tribute to the Muses, as the poets of the period used to say, the king found M. Fouquet waiting for an audience. Behind the king came M. Colbert, who had met the king in the corridor, as if on the watch for him, and followed him like a jealous and watchful shadow,—M. Colbert, with his square head, and his vulgar and untidy though rich costume, which gave him some resemblance to a Flemish gentleman after drinking beer. Fouquet, at the sight of his enemy, remained unmoved, and during the whole of the scene which followed observed that line of conduct so difficult to a man of refinement whose heart is filled with contempt, but who wishes to suppress every indication of it, lest he may do his adversary too much honour. Colbert did not conceal his insolent joy. In his opinion, M. Fouquet's was a game very badly played and hopelessly lost, although not yet finished. Colbert belonged to that school of politicians who think cleverness alone worthy of their admiration, and success the only thing worth caring for. Colbert, moreover, who was not simply an envious and jealous man, but who had the king's interest really at heart, because he was thoroughly imbued with the highest sense of probity in all matters of figures and accounts, could well afford to assign as a pretext for his conduct, that in hating and doing his utmost to ruin M. Fouquet he had nothing in view but the welfare of the State and the dignity of the crown.

None of these details escaped Fouquet's observation. Through his enemy's thick, busy brows, and despite the restless movement of his eyelids, he could, by merely looking at his eyes, penetrate to the very bottom of Colbert's heart; he saw, then, all there was in that heart,—hatred and triumph. But as he wished, while observing everything, to remain himself impenetrable, he composed his features, smiled with that charmingly sympathetic smile which was peculiarly his own, and saluted the king with the most dignified and graceful ease and elasticity of manner. "Sire," he said, "I perceive by your Majesty's joyous air that you have had a pleasant ride."—"Charming, indeed, Monsieur the Superintendent, charming.

You were very wrong not to come with us as I invited you to do."—"I was working, Sire," replied the superintendent, who did not take the trouble to turn aside his head even in recognition of Colbert's presence.

"Ah! M. Fouquet," cried the king, "there is nothing like the country. I should be delighted to live in the country always, in the open air and under the trees."—"Oh! your Majesty is not yet weary of the throne, I trust?" said Fouquet. —"No; but thrones of soft turf are very delightful."

"Your Majesty gratifies my utmost wishes in speaking in that manner, for I have a request to submit to you."—"On whose behalf, Monsieur?"—"On behalf of the nymphs of Vaux, Sire."—"Ah! ah!" said Louis XIV.

"Your Majesty once deigned to make me a promise," said Fouquet.—"Yes, I remember it."—"The *fête* at Vaux, the celebrated *fête*, is it not, Sire?" said Colbert, endeavouring to show his importance by taking part in the conversation.

Fouquet, with the profoundest contempt, did not take the slightest notice of the remark, as if, so far as he was concerned, Colbert had not spoken. "Your Majesty is aware," he said, "that I destine my estate at Vaux to receive the most amiable of princes, the most powerful of monarchs."—"I have given you my promise, Monsieur," said Louis XIV., smiling; "and a king never departs from his word."—"And I have come now, Sire, to inform your Majesty that I am ready to obey your orders in every respect."

"Do you promise me many wonders, Monsieur the Superintendent?" said Louis, looking at Colbert.—"Wonders? Oh, no, Sire! I do not undertake that; but I hope to be able to procure your Majesty a little pleasure, perhaps even a little forgetfulness of the cares of State."—"Nay, nay, M. Fouquet," returned the king; "I insist upon the word 'wonders.' Oh, you are a magician! We know your power; we know that you could find gold, even were there none in the world. And, in fact, people say you make it."

Fouquet felt that the shot was discharged from a double quiver, and that the king had launched an arrow from his own bow as well as one from Colbert's. "Oh!" said he, laughingly, "the people know perfectly well out of what mine I procure the gold; they know it only too well, perhaps. Besides," he added proudly, "I can assure your Majesty that the gold destined to pay the expenses of the *fête* at Vaux will cost neither blood nor tears; hard labour it may, perhaps, but that can be paid for."

Digitized by Google

Louis remained silent; he wished to look at Colbert. Colbert, too, wished to reply; but a glance as swift as an eagle's,—a proud, loyal, king-like glance, indeed,—which Fouquet darted at the latter, arrested the words upon his lips. The king, who had by this time recovered his self-possession, turned towards Fouquet, saying, "I presume, therefore, I am now to consider myself formally invited?"—"Yes, Sire, if it pleases your Majesty."—"For what day?"—"Any day your Majesty may find most convenient."

"You speak like an enchanter who improvises, M. Fouquet. I could not say so much, indeed."—"Your Majesty will do, whenever you please, everything that a monarch can and ought to do. The King of France has servants at his bidding who are able to do anything on his behalf, to accomplish everything to gratify his pleasures." Colbert tried to look at the superintendent in order to see whether this remark was an approach to less hostile sentiments on his part. But Fouquet had not even looked at his enemy; so far as he was concerned, Colbert did not exist.

"Very good, then," said the king; "will a week hence suit you?"—"Perfectly well, Sire."—"This is Tuesday; if I give you until next Sunday week, will that be sufficient?"—"The delay which your Majesty deigns to accord me will greatly aid the various works which my architects have in hand for the purpose of adding to the amusement of your Majesty and your friends."

"By the by, speaking of my friends," resumed the king; "how do you intend to treat them?"—"The king is master everywhere, Sire; your Majesty will draw up your own list and give your own orders. All those you may deign to invite will be my guests,—my honoured guests indeed."—"I thank you!" returned the king, touched by the noble thought expressed in so noble a tone.

Fouquet therefore took leave of Louis XIV., after a few words had been added with regard to the details of certain matters of business. He felt that Colbert would remain behind with the king, that they would both converse about him, and that neither of them would spare him in the least degree. The satisfaction of being able to give a last and terrible blow to his enemy seemed to him almost like a compensation for everything to which they were about to subject him. He turned back again immediately, when he had already reached the door, and addressing the king, "Pardon, Sire," said he,—"pardon!"

"Pardon for what?" said the king, graciously.—"For a serious fault which I committed unawares."—"A fault! You! Ah, M. Fouquet, I shall be unable to do otherwise than forgive you. In what way or against whom have you been found wanting?"—"Against all propriety, Sire. I forgot to inform your Majesty of a circumstance of considerable importance."—"What is it?"

Colbert trembled; he expected a denunciation. His conduct had been unmasked. A single syllable from Fouquet, a single proof formally advanced, and before the youthful loyalty of Louis XIV. Colbert's favour would disappear at once. The latter trembled, therefore, lest so daring a blow might not overthrow his whole scaffold. In point of fact, the opportunity was so admirably suited to be taken advantage of, that a skilful player like Aramis would not have let it slip. "Sire," said Fouquet, with an easy air, "since you have had the kindness to forgive me, I am indifferent about my confession: this morning I sold one of the official appointments I hold."—"One of your appointments?" said the king; "which?" Colbert turned livid. "That which conferred upon me, Sire, a grand gown and an air of gravity,—the appointment of procureur-général.

The king involuntarily uttered a loud exclamation and looked at Colbert, who with his face bedewed with perspiration felt almost on the point of fainting. "To whom have you sold this appointment, M. Fouquet?" inquired the king. Colbert was obliged to lean against the side of the fireplace. "To a councillor belonging to the parliament, Sire, whose name is Vanel."—"Vanel?"—"A friend of the intendant Colbert," added Fouquet, letting every word fall from his lips with inimitable nonchalance, and with an admirably assumed expression of forgetfulness and ignorance which neither painter, actor, nor poet could reproduce with brush, gesture, or pen. Then having finished, having overwhelmed Colbert beneath the weight of this superiority, the superintendent again saluted the king, and quitted the room, partially revenged by the stupefaction of the king and the humiliation of the favourite.

"Is it really possible," said the king, as soon as Fouquet had disappeared, "that he has sold that office?"—"Yes, Sire," said Colbert, meaningly.—"He must be mad," the king added.

Colbert this time did not reply; he had penetrated the king's thought. That thought promised him revenge. His hatred was augmented by jealousy; and a threat of disgrace was now

added to the plan he had arranged for his ruin. Colbert felt assured that for the future, as between Louis XIV. and himself, his hostile ideas would meet with no obstacles, and that at the first fault committed by Fouquet which could be laid hold of as a pretext, the chastisement impending over him would be precipitated. Fouquet had thrown aside his weapons of defence; Hate and Jealousy had picked them up. Colbert was invited by the king to the *fête* at Vaux; he bowed like a man confident in himself, and accepted the invitation with the air of one who confers a favour. The king was about writing down De Saint-Aignan's name on his list of invitations, when the usher announced the Comte de Saint-Aignan. As soon as the royal "Mercury" entered, Colbert discreetly withdrew.

CHAPTER CXCVI

RIVAL LOVERS

De Saint-Aignan had quitted Louis XIV. hardly two hours before; but in the first effervescence of his affection, whenever Louis XIV. did not see La Vallière he was obliged to talk of her. Now, the only person with whom he could speak about her at his ease was De Saint-Aignan, and that person had therefore become indispensable to him.

"Ah! is that you, Count?" the king exclaimed, as soon as he perceived him,—doubly delighted, not only to see him again, but also to get rid of Colbert, whose scowling face always put him out of humour,—"so much the better. I am very glad to see you; you will make one of the travelling party, I suppose?"—"Of what travelling-party are you speaking, Sire?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.—"The one we are making up to go to the *fête* the superintendent is about to give at Vaux. Ah! De Saint-Aignan, you will at last see a *fête*, a royal *fête*, by the side of which all our amusements at Fontainebleau are petty, contemptible affairs."—"At Vaux?—the superintendent going to give a *fête* in your Majesty's honour? Nothing more than that!"

"'Nothing more than that!' do you say? It is very diverting to find you treating it with so much disdain. Are you, who express such indifference on the subject, aware that as soon as it is known that M. Fouquet is going to receive me at Vaux

next Sunday week, people will be striving their very utmost to get invited to the *fête?* I repeat, De Saint-Aignan, you shall be one of the invited guests."—"Very well, Sire; unless I shall in the meantime have undertaken a longer and less agreeable journey."—"What journey?"—"The one across the Styx, Sire."—"Bah!" said Louis XIV., laughing.

"No, seriously, Sire," replied De Saint-Aignan, "I am invited there; and in such a way, in truth, that I hardly know what to say or how to act in order to refuse it."—"I do not understand you. I know that you are in a poetical vein; but try not to sink from Apollo to Phœbus."—"Very well; if your Majesty will deign to listen to me, I will not keep you in suspense any longer."—"Speak!"

"Your Majesty knows the Baron du Vallon?"—"Yes, indeed,—a good servant to my father, the late king, and an admirable companion at table; for I think you are referring to him who dined with us at Fontainebleau?"—"Precisely; but you have omitted to add to his other qualifications, Sire, that he is a most charming killer of people."—"What! does M. du Vallon wish to kill you?"—"Or to get me killed,—which is the same thing."—"Bless my heart!"

"Do not laugh, Sire, for I am not saying a word that is not the exact truth."—"And you say he wishes to get you killed?"—"That is that excellent person's present idea."—"Be easy; I will defend you, if he be in the wrong."—"Ah! there is an 'if.'"—"Of course! Answer me as candidly as if it were some one else's affair instead of your own, my poor De Saint-Aignan: is he right or wrong?"—"Your Majesty shall be the judge."

"What have you done to him?"—"To him, personally, nothing at all; but it seems I have to one of his friends."—"It is all the same. Is his friend one of the celebrated 'four'?"—"No! It is only the son of one of the celebrated 'four.'"—"What have you done to the son? Come, tell me."—"Why, I have helped some one to take his mistress from him."

"You confess it, then?"—"I cannot help confessing it, for it is true."—"In that case you are wrong."—"Ah! I am wrong?"—"Yes; and, my faith, if he kills you—"—"Well?"—"Well, he will do what is right."

"Ah! that is your Majesty's way of reasoning, then?"—"Do you think it a bad way?"—"It is a very expeditious way, at all events."—"'Good justice is prompt;' so my grandfather Henry IV. used to say."—"In that case your Majesty

Digitized by Google

will immediately sign my adversary's pardon, for he is now waiting for me at the Minimes to kill me."

"His name, and a parchment!"—"There is a parchment upon your Majesty's table; and as for his name—"—"Well, what is it?"—"The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Sire."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne!" exclaimed the king, changing from a fit of laughter to the most profound stupor; and then after a moment's silence, while he wiped his forehead, which was bedewed with perspiration, he again murmured, "Bragelonne!"—"No other than he, Sire."—"Bragelonne, who was affianced to—"—"Yes, Sire."

"He was in London, however."—"Yes; but I can assure you, Sire, he is there no longer."—"Is he in Paris?"—"He is at the Minimes, Sire, where he is waiting for me, as I have already had the honour of telling you."

"Does he know all?"—"Yes; and many things besides. Perhaps your Majesty would like to look at the letter I have received from him;" and De Saint-Aignan drew from his pocket the note with which we are already acquainted. "When your Majesty has read the letter, I will tell you how it reached me."

The king read it in great agitation, and immediately said, "Well?"—"Well, Sire; your Majesty knows a certain carved lock, closing a certain door of ebony-wood, which separates a certain apartment from a certain blue and white sanctuary?"—"Of course! Louise's boudoir."—"Yes, Sire. Well, it was in the key-hole of that lock that I found that note. Who placed it there? Either M. de Bragelonne, or the devil himself; but inasmuch as the note smells of amber and not of sulphur, I conclude that it must be, not the devil, but M. de Bragelonne."

Louis bent down his head, and seemed absorbed in sad and melancholy reflections. Perhaps something like remorse was at that moment passing through his heart. "Oh!" he said, "that secret discovered!"—"Sire, I shall do my utmost that the secret dies in the breast of the man who possesses it," said De Saint-Aignan, in a tone of bravado, as he moved towards the door; but a gesture of the king made him pause.

"Where are you going?" he inquired.—"Where I am waited for, Sire."—"What for?"—"To fight, in all probability."—"You fight!" exclaimed the king. "One moment, if you please, Monsieur the Count!"

De Saint-Aignan shook his head, as a rebellious child does whenever any one interferes to prevent him from throwing

himself into a well or playing with a knife. "But yet, Sire—" he said.—"In the first place," continued the king, "I require to be enlightened a little."—"Upon that point, if your Majesty will be pleased to interrogate me," replied De Saint-Aignan, "I will throw what light I can."

"Who told you that M. de Bragelonne had penetrated into that room?"—"The letter which I found in the key-hole told me so."—"Who told you that it was De Bragelonne who put it there?"—"Who but himself would have dared to undertake such a mission?"—"You are right. How was he able to get into your rooms?"—"Ah! that is very serious, inasmuch as all the doors were closed, and my lackey, Basque, had the keys in his pocket."—"Your lackey must have been bribed."—"Impossible, Sire; for if he had been bribed, those who did so would not have sacrificed the poor fellow, whom it is not unlikely they might want to turn to further use by and by, in showing so clearly that it was he of whom they had made use."

"Quite true. And now there remains but one conjecture."—"Let us see, Sire, if it is the same that has presented itself to my mind."—"That he effected an entrance by means of the staircase."—"Alas! Sire, that seems to me more than probable."—"There is no doubt that some one sold the secret of the trap-door."—"Either sold it or gave it."

"Why do you make that distinction?"—"Because there are certain persons, Sire, who being above the price of a treason give, and do not sell."—"What do you mean?"—"Oh, Sire, your Majesty's mind is too clear-sighted not to guess what I mean, and you will save me the embarrassment of naming any one."

"You are right: you mean Madame!"—"Ah!" said De Saint-Aignan.—"Madame, whose suspicions were aroused by your changing your lodgings."—"Madame, who has keys of the apartments of her maids of honour, and is powerful enough to discover what no one but yourself or she would be able to discover."

"And you suppose, then, that my sister has entered into an alliance with Bragelonne?"—"Eh! eh! Sire—"—"So far as to inform him of all the details of the affair?"—"Perhaps even further still."—"Further? What do you mean?"—"Perhaps to the point of going with him."

"Which way,—through your own apartments?"—"You think it impossible, Sire? Well, listen to me! Your Majesty knows that Madame is very fond of perfumes?"—"Yes, she

acquired that taste from my mother."—"Vervain particularly."—"Yes, it is the scent she prefers to all others."—"Very good, Sire! my apartments smell very strongly of vervain."

The king remained silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then resumed: "But why should Madame take Bragelonne's part against me?" De Saint-Aignan could very easily have replied: "A woman's jealousy!" In his question the king had probed his friend to the bottom of his heart to ascertain if he had learned the secret of his flirtation with his sister-in-law. But De Saint-Aignan was not an ordinary courtier; he did not lightly run the risk of finding out family secrets; and he was too good a friend of the Muses not to think very frequently of poor Ovidius Naso, whose eyes shed so many tears in expiation of his crime for having once beheld something, one hardly knows what, in the palace of Augustus. He therefore passed by Madame's secret very skilfully. But since he had exhibited his sagacity in proving Madame's presence in his rooms with Bragelonne, it was now necessary for him to pay interest on that self-conceit, and reply clearly to the question, "Why has Madame taken Bragelonne's part against me?"

"Why?" replied De Saint-Aignan. "Your Majesty forgets, I presume, that the Comte de Guiche is the intimate friend of the Vicomte de Bragelonne?"—"I do not see the connection, however," said the king.—"Ah! I beg your pardon then, Sire; but I thought the Comte de Guiche was a very great friend of Madame."—"Quite true," the king returned. "There is no occasion to search any further; the blow came from that direction."

"And is not your Majesty of the opinion that in order to ward it off it will be necessary to deal another blow?"—"Yes; but not one of the kind given in the Bois de Vincennes," replied the king.—"You forget, Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, "that I am a gentleman, and that I have been challenged."—"The challenge neither concerns nor was it intended for you."—"But it is I who have been expected at the Minimes, Sire, during the last hour and more; and I shall be dishonoured if I do not go there."

"The first honour and duty of a gentleman is obedience to his sovereign."—"Sire!"—"I order you to remain."—"Sire!"—"Obey, Monsieur!"—"As your Majesty pleases."—"Besides, I wish to have the whole of this affair explained; I wish to know how it is that I have been so insolently trifled with as to have the sanctuary of my affection pried into. It is not you,

De Saint-Aignan, who ought to punish those who have acted in this manner; for it is not your honour they have attacked, but my own."

"I implore your Majesty not to overwhelm M. de Bragelonne with your wrath; for although in the whole of this affair he may have shown himself deficient in prudence, he has not been so in his feelings of loyalty."—"Enough! I shall know how to decide between the just and the unjust, even in the height of my anger. But take care that not a word of this is breathed to Madame!"

"But what am I to do with regard to M. de Bragelonne? He will be seeking me in every direction, and—"—"I shall either have spoken to him, or taken care that he has been spoken to before the evening is over."—"Let me once more entreat your Majesty to be indulgent towards him."—"I have been indulgent long enough, Count," said Louis XIV., frowning; "it is time to show certain persons that I am master in my own palace."

The king had hardly pronounced these words, which betokened that a fresh feeling of dissatisfaction was mingled with the remembrance of an old one, when the usher appeared at the door of the cabinet. "What is the matter," inquired the king, "and why do you presume to come when I have not summoned you?"—"Sire," said the usher, "your Majesty desired me to permit M. le Comte de la Fère to pass freely at any time when he might wish to speak to your Majesty."—"Well?"—"M. le Comte de la Fère is now waiting to see your Majesty."

The king and De Saint-Aignan at this reply exchanged a look which betrayed more uneasiness than surprise. Louis hesitated for a moment, but almost immediately forming a resolution, he said: "Go, De Saint-Aignan, and find Louise; inform her of the plot against us. Do not let her be ignorant that Madame is beginning again her persecutions, and that she has set to work those who would have done better had they remained neutral."—"Sire—"—"If Louise gets nervous and frightened, reassure her; her that her the king's love is an impenetrable shield over her. If, as I suspect is the case, she already knows everything, or if she has already been herself subjected to an attack, tell her, be sure to tell her, De Saint-Aignan," added the king, trembling with passion,—"tell her, I say, that this time, instead of defending her, I will avenge her, and that too so terribly that no one will in future even dare to raise his eyes towards her."—"Is that all, Sire?"—"Yes; all. Go quickly,

Digitized by Google

and remain faithful,—you who live in the midst of this hell without having, like myself, the hope of paradise."

De Saint-Aignan almost exhausted himself in protestations of devotion, took the king's hand, kissed it, and left the room radiant with delight.

CHAPTER CXCVII

KING AND NOBILITY

The king endeavoured to recover his self-possession as quickly as possible, in order to meet M. de la Fère with an undisturbed countenance. He clearly saw that it was not mere chance which had induced the count's visit. He had a vague impression of the serious import of that visit; but he felt that to a man of Athos's tone of mind, to a person so distinguished, nothing disagreeable or disordered should be presented. As soon as the king had satisfied himself that so far as appearances were concerned he was perfectly calm again, he gave directions to the ushers to introduce the count. A few minutes afterwards Athos, in full court dress and with his breast covered with the orders that he alone had the right to wear at the court of France, presented himself with so grave and solemn an air that the king perceived at the first glance that he had not been mistaken in his anticipations. Louis advanced a step towards the count, and with a smile held out his hand to him, over which Athos bowed with the air of the deepest respect.

"M. le Comte de la Fère," said the king, rapidly, "you are so seldom here that it is a very great happiness to see you." Athos bowed and replied, "I should wish always to enjoy the happiness of being near your Majesty." That reply, made in that tone, evidently signified, "I should wish to be one of your Majesty's advisers, to save you from the commission of faults." The king so understood it, and determined in this man's presence to preserve all the advantages which could be derived from his command over himself as well as from his rank and position.

"I see you have something to say to me," he said.—"Had it not been so, I should not have presumed to present myself before your Majesty."—"Speak, quickly; I am anxious to satisfy you," returned the king, seating himself.

"I am persuaded," replied Athos, in a slightly agitated tone of voice, "that your Majesty will give me every satisfaction."

—"Ah!" said the king, with a certain haughtiness of manner, "you have come to lodge a complaint here, then?"—"It would be a complaint," returned Athos, "only in the event of your Majesty— But if you will deign to permit me, Sire, I will begin the conversation at the beginning."—"I am listening."

"Your Majesty will remember that at the period of the Duke of Buckingham's departure I had the honour of an interview with you."—"At or about that period I think I remember you did; only, with regard to the subject of the conversation, I have quite forgotten it." Athos started, as he replied: "I shall have the honour to recall it to your Majesty. It was with regard to a demand which I addressed to you respecting a marriage which M. de Bragelonne wished to contract with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."—"Ah!" thought the king, "we have come to it now. I remember," he said, aloud.

"At that period," pursued Athos, "your Majesty was so kind and generous towards M. de Bragelonne and myself that not a single word which then fell from your lips has escaped my memory; and when I asked your Majesty to accord me Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand for M. de Bragelonne, you refused."—"Quite true," said Louis, dryly.

"Alleging," Athos hastened to say, "that the young lady had no position in society." Louis could hardly force himself to listen patiently. "That," added Athos, "she had but little fortune." The king threw himself back in his arm-chair. "That her extraction was indifferent." A renewed impatience on the part of the king. "And little beauty," added Athos, pitilessly.

This last bolt buried itself deep in the king's heart, and made him almost bound from his seat. "You have a good memory, Monsieur," he said.—"I invariably have, on all occasions when I have had the distinguished honour of an interview with your Majesty," retorted the count, without being in the least disconcerted.

"Very good; it is admitted I said all that."—"And I thanked your Majesty, because those words testified an interest in M. de Bragelonne, which did him much honour."—"And you may possibly remember," said the king, very deliberately, "that you had the greatest repugnance to this marriage?"—"Quite true, Sire."—"And that you solicited my permission against your own inclination?"—"Yes, Sire."—"And, finally, I remember also,—for I have a memory nearly as good as your own,—I remember, I say, that you observed at the time: 'I do not

believe that Mademoiselle de la Vallière loves M. de Bragelonne.' Is that true?"

The blow told well, but Athos did not shrink. "Sire," he said, "I have already begged your Majesty's forgiveness; but there are certain particulars in that conversation which will be intelligible in the *dénouement*."—"Well, what is the *dénouement*, Monsieur?"—"This: your Majesty then said that you would defer the marriage out of regard for M. de Bragelonne's own interests." The king remained silent. "M. de Bragelonne is now so exceedingly unhappy that he cannot any longer defer asking your Majesty for a solution of the matter."

The king turned pale; Athos looked at him with fixed attention. "And what," said the king, with considerable hesitation, "does M. de Bragelonne request?"—"Precisely the very thing that I came to ask your Majesty for at my last audience; namely, your Majesty's consent to his marriage."

The king remained silent. "The obstacles in the way are all now quite removed for us," continued Athos. "Mademoiselle de la Vallière, without fortune, birth, or beauty, is not the less on that account the only good match in the world for M. de Bragelonne, since he loves this young girl." The king pressed his hands impatiently together. "Does your Majesty hesitate?" inquired the count, without losing a particle either of his firmness or his politeness.—"I do not hesitate,—I refuse," replied the king.

Athos paused a moment, as if to collect himself. "I have had the honour," he said in a mild tone, "to observe to your Majesty that no obstacle now interferes with M. de Bragelonne's affections, and that his determination seems unalterable."—"There is my will,—and that is an obstacle, I should imagine!"—"That is the most serious of all," Athos replied quickly.—"Ah!"—"And may we therefore be permitted to ask your Majesty, with the greatest humility, for your reason for this refusal?"—"The reason! A question to me!" exclaimed the king.—"A demand, Sire!"

The king, leaning with both his hands upon the table, said in a deep tone of concentrated passion: "You have lost all recollection of what is usual at court. At court no one questions the king."—"Very true, Sire; but if men do not question, they conjecture."—"Conjecture! What may that mean, Monsieur?"—"Almost always the conjecture of the subject impugns the frankness of the king."—"Monsieur!"—"And a want of confidence on the part of the subject," pursued Athos, intrepidly.

"You are forgetting yourself," said the king, hurried away by his anger in spite of his control over himself.—"Sire, I am obliged to seek elsewhere for what I thought I should find in your Majesty. Instead of obtaining a reply from you, I am compelled to make one for myself." The king rose. "Monsieur the Count," he said, "I have now given you all the time I had at my disposal."

This was a dismissal. "Sire," replied the count, "I have not yet had time to tell your Majesty what I came with the express object of saying, and I so rarely see your Majesty that I ought to avail myself of the opportunity."—"Just now you spoke of conjectures; you are now becoming offensive, Monsieur."—"Oh, Sire, offend your Majesty! I? Never! All my life have I maintained that kings are above all other men, not only in rank and power, but in nobleness of heart and dignity of mind. I never can bring myself to believe that my sovereign—he who passed his word to me—did so with a mental reservation."

"What do you mean? What mental reservation?"—"I will explain my meaning," said Athos, coldly. "If in refusing Mademoiselle de la Vallière to M. de Bragelonne your Majesty had some other object in view than the happiness and fortune of the viscount—"—"You perceive, Monsieur, that you are offending me."—"If in requiring the viscount to delay his marriage your Majesty's only object was to remove the gentleman to whom Mademoiselle de la Vallière was engaged—"—"Monsieur! Monsieur!"—"I have heard it said so in every direction, Sire. Your Majesty's love for Mademoiselle de la Vallière is spoken of on all sides."

The king tore his gloves, which he had been biting for some time. "Woe to those," he cried, "who interfere in my affairs! I have chosen my course; I will crush all obstacles."—"What obstacles?" said Athos. The king stopped short, like a runaway horse whose bit being turned in his mouth bruises his palate. "I love Mademoiselle de la Vallière," he said suddenly, with nobleness and with passion.

"But," interrupted Athos, "that does not preclude your Majesty from allowing M. de Bragelonne to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The sacrifice is worthy of so great a monarch; it is fully merited by M. de Bragelonne, who has already rendered great service to your Majesty, and who may well be regarded as a brave and worthy man. Your Majesty, therefore, in renouncing the affection you entertain, offers a proof at once of generosity, gratitude, and good policy."

Digitized by Google

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière does not love M. de Bragelonne," said the king, hoarsely.—"Does your Majesty know that to be the case?" remarked Athos, with a searching look.—"I do know it."—"Within a short time, then; for doubtless had your Majesty known it when I first preferred my request, you would have taken the trouble to inform me of it."—"Within a short time."

Athos remained silent for a moment, and then resumed: "In that case I do not understand why your Majesty should have sent M. de Bragelonne to London. That exile, and with good reason, is a matter of astonishment to all who love the honour of the king."—"Who presumes to speak of my honour, M. de la Fère?"—"The king's honour, Sire, is made up of the honour of his whole nobility. Whenever the king offends one of his gentlemen,—that is, whenever he deprives him of the smallest particle of his honour,—it is from him, from the king himself, that that portion of honour is stolen."—"M. de la Fère!" said the king, haughtily.—"Sire, you sent M. de Bragelonne to London either before you were Mademoiselle de la Vallière's lover or since you have become so."

The king, irritated beyond measure, especially because he felt that he was mastered, endeavoured to dismiss Athos by a gesture. "Sire," replied the count, "I will tell you all; I will not leave your presence until I have been satisfied either by your Majesty or by myself,—satisfied if you prove to me that you are right, satisfied if I prove to you that you are wrong. Oh, you will listen to me, Sire! I am old now, and I am attached to everything that is really great and true in your kingdom. I am a gentleman who shed my blood for your father and for yourself, without ever having asked a single favour either from yourself or from your father. I have never inflicted the slightest wrong or injury on any one in this world, and have put kings under obligations to me. You will listen to me. I have come to ask you for an account of the honour of one of your servants whom you have deceived by a falsehood or betrayed through weakness. I know that these words irritate your Majesty; but on the other hand, the facts are killing us. I know you are inquiring what penalty you will inflict for my frankness; but I know what punishment I will implore God to inflict upon you when I set before him your perjury and my son's unhappiness."

The king during these remarks was walking hurriedly to and fro, his hand thrust into the breast of his coat, his head haughtily

raised, his eyes blazing with wrath. "Monsieur," he cried suddenly, "if I acted towards you as the king, you would be already punished; but I am only a man, and I have the right to love in this world every one who loves me,—a happiness which is so rarely found."—"You cannot pretend to such a right as a man any more than as a king, Sire; or if you intended to exercise that right in a loyal manner, you should have told M. de Bragelonne so, and not have exiled him."

"I think I am condescending to dispute with you, Monsieur!" interrupted Louis XIV., with that majesty of air and manner which he alone was able to give to his look and his voice.—"I was hoping that you would reply to me," said the count.

"You shall know my reply, Monsieur, very soon."—"You already know my thoughts on the subject," was the Comte de la Fère's answer.—"You have forgotten you are speaking to the king, Monsieur. It is a crime."—"You have forgotten you are destroying the lives of two men, Sire. It is a mortal sin."

"Go!—at once!"—"Not until I have said to you: Son of Louis XIII., you begin your reign badly, for you begin it by abduction and disloyalty! My race—myself, too—are now freed from all that affection and respect towards you to which I bound my son by oath in the vaults of St. Denis, in the presence of the relics of your noble forefathers. You are now become our enemy, Sire; and henceforth we have nothing to do save with Heaven alone, our sole master. Be warned!"

"Do you threaten?"—"Oh, no!" said Athos, sadly; "I have as little bravado as fear in my soul. The God of whom I spoke to you is now listening to me. He knows that for the safety and honour of your crown I would even yet shed every drop of blood which twenty years of civil and foreign warfare have left in my veins. I can well say, then, that I threaten the king as little as I threaten the man; but I tell you, Sire, you lose two servants,—for you have destroyed faith in the heart of the father and love in the heart of the son: the one ceases to believe in the royal word, the other no longer believes in the loyalty of man or the purity of woman; the one is dead to every feeling of respect, the other to obedience. Adieu!"

Thus saying, Athos broke his sword across his knee, slowly placed the two pieces upon the floor, and saluting the king, who was almost choking from rage and shame, quitted the cabinet. Louis, who sat near the table, completely overwhelmed, spent several minutes in recovering himself, then suddenly rose and rang the bell violently. "Tell M. d'Artagnan to come here," he said to the terrified ushers.

CHAPTER CXCVIII

AFTER THE STORM

Our readers will doubtless have been asking themselves how it happened that Athos, of whom not a word has been said for some time past, arrived so very opportunely at court. Our claim, as narrator, being that we unfold events in exact logical sequence, we hold ourselves ready to answer that question.

Porthos, faithful to his duty as an arranger of affairs, had immediately after leaving the Palais-Royal set off to join Raoul at the Minimes in the Bois de Vincennes, and had related everything, even to the smallest details, which had passed between De Saint-Aignan and himself. He finished by saying that the message which the king had sent to his favourite would not probably occasion more than a short delay, and that De Saint-Aignan, as soon as he could leave the king, would not lose a moment in accepting the invitation which Raoul had sent him. But Raoul, less credulous than his old friend, had concluded, from Porthos's recital, that if De Saint-Aignan was going to the king, De Saint-Aignan would tell the king everything, and that the king would therefore forbid De Saint-Aignan to obey the summons he had received to the hostile meeting. The consequence of his reflections was that he had left Porthos to remain at the place appointed for the meeting, in the very improbable case that De Saint-Aignan would come there; and had urged Porthos not to remain there more than an hour or an hour and a half. Porthos, however, formally refused to assent to that, but on the contrary installed himself in the Minimes as if he were going to take root there, making Raoul promise that when he had been to see his father, he would return to his own apartments, in order that Porthos's servant might know where to find him in case M. de Saint-Aignan should happen to come to the rendezvous.

Bragelonne had left Vincennes, and had proceeded at once straight to the apartments of Athos, who had been in Paris during the last two days, and had been already informed of what had taken place by a letter from D'Artagnan. Raoul arrived at his father's. Athos, after having held out his hand to him, and embraced him most affectionately, made a sign for him to sit down. "I know you come to me as a man would

Digitized by Google

go to a friend, Viscount, whenever he is suffering; tell me, therefore, what it is that brings you now."

The young man bowed, and began his recital; more than once in the course of it his tears choked his utterance, and a sob checked in his throat compelled him to pause in his narration. However, he finished at last. Athos most probably already knew how matters stood, as we have just now said that D'Artagnan had already written to him; but preserving until the conclusion that calm, unruffled composure of manner which constituted the almost superhuman side of his character, he replied: "Raoul, I do not believe there is a word of truth in the rumours; I do not believe in the existence of what you fear, although I do not deny that persons most entitled to the fullest credit have already conversed with me on the subject. In my heart and soul I think it impossible that the king could be guilty of such an outrage upon a gentleman. I will answer for the king, therefore, and will soon bring you back the proof of what I say." Raoul, wavering like a drunken man between what he had seen with his own eyes and the imperturbable faith he had in a man who had never told a falsehood, bowed, and simply answered, "Go, then, Monsieur the Count; I will await your return;" and he sat down, burying his face in his hands.

Athos dressed, and then left him in order to wait upon the king; what occurred in the interview with the king is already known to our readers. When he returned to his lodgings, Raoul, pale and dejected, had not quitted his attitude of despair. At the sound, however, of the opening doors and of his father's footsteps, as he approached him, the young man raised his head. Athos's face was very pale, his head uncovered, and his manner full of seriousness; he gave his cloak and hat to the lackey, dismissed him with a gesture, and sat down near Raoul.

"Well, Monsieur," inquired the young man, "are you quite convinced now?"—"I am, Raoul; the king loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière."—"He confesses it, then?" cried Raoul.—"Yes," replied Athos.

"And she?"—"I have not seen her."—"No; but the king spoke to you about her. What did he say?"—"He says that she loves him."

"Oh, you see,—you see, Monsieur!" said the young man, with a gesture of despair.—"Raoul," resumed the count, "I told the king, believe me, all that you yourself could possibly have said; and I believe I did so in becoming language, though sufficiently firm."—"And what did you say to him, Monsieur?"

—"I told him, Raoul, that everything was now at an end between him and ourselves; that you would never serve him again. I told him that I, too, should remain aloof. Nothing further remains for me, then, but to be satisfied of one thing."—"What is that, Monsieur?"—"Whether you have determined to adopt any steps."

"Any steps? Regarding what?"—"With reference to your disappointed affection and—"—"Finish, Monsieur!"—"And with reference to revenge; for I fear that you think of avenging your wrongs."—"Oh, Monsieur, with regard to my affection, I shall perhaps, some day or other, succeed in tearing it from my heart; I trust I shall do so, aided by Heaven's merciful help and your wise exhortations. So far as vengeance is concerned, it occurred to me only when under the influence of an evil thought, for I could not revenge myself upon the one who is actually guilty; I have therefore already renounced every idea of revenge."

"And so you no longer think of seeking a quarrel with M. de Saint-Aignan?"—"No, Monsieur. I sent him a challenge. If he accepts it, I will maintain it; it he does not take it up, I will leave it where it is."—"And La Vallière?"—"You cannot, I know, have seriously thought that I should dream of revenging myself upon a woman?" replied Raoul, with a smile so sad that a tear started even to the eyes of his father, who had so many times in the course of his life been bowed beneath his own sorrows and those of others.

Athos held out his hand to Raoul, which the latter seized most eagerly. "And so, Monsieur the Count, you are quite satisfied that the misfortune is without a remedy?" inquired the young man. Athos shook his head. "Poor boy!" he murmured.—"You think that I still hope," said Raoul, "and you pity me. Oh, it is indeed a horrible suffering for me to despise, as I ought to do, her whom I have loved so devotedly. If I but had some real cause of complaint against her, I should be happy, and should be able to forgive her."

Athos looked at his son with a sorrowful air. The few words which Raoul had just pronounced seemed to have issued out of his own heart. At this moment the servant announced M. d'Artagnan. This name sounded very differently to the ears of Athos and of Raoul.

The musketeer entered the room with a vague smile upon his lips. Raoul paused. Athos walked towards his friend with an expression of face which did not escape Bragelonne.

D'Artagnan answered Athos's look by a simple movement of the eyelid; and then, advancing towards Raoul, whom he took by the hand, he said, addressing both father and son, "Well, you are trying to console the boy, it seems."—"And you, kind and good as usual, are come to help me in my difficult task." As he said this, Athos pressed D'Artagnan's hand between both his own. Raoul fancied he observed in this pressure something beyond the sense his mere words conveyed. "Yes," replied the musketeer, smoothing his moustache with the hand that Athos had left free,—"yes, I have come also."

"You are most welcome, Chevalier; not for the consolation you bring with you, but on your own account. I am already consoled," said Raoul; and he attempted to smile, but the effect was far more sad than any tears D'Artagnan had ever seen shed. "That is all well and good, then," said D'Artagnan. —"Only," continued Raoul, "you have arrived just as the count was about to give me the details of his interview with the king. You will allow the count to continue?" added the young man, as with his eyes fixed on the musketeer he seemed to search the depths of his heart.

"His interview with the king?" said D'Artagnan, in a tone so natural and unassumed that there was no reason to doubt his astonishment. "You have seen the king then, Athos?" Athos smiled as he said, "Yes, I have seen him."—"Ah, indeed! you were ignorant, then, that the count had seen his Majesty?" inquired Raoul, half reassured.—"My faith, yes! entirely."—"In that case I am less uneasy," said Raoul.

"Uneasy—and about what?" inquired Athos.—"Forgive me, Monsieur," said Raoul; "but knowing so well the regard and affection you have for me, I was afraid you might possibly have expressed somewhat plainly to his Majesty my own sufferings and your indignation, and that the king had consequently —"—"And that the king had consequently—" repeated D'Artagnan; "well, go on, finish what you were going to say."—"I have now to ask you to forgive me, M. d'Artagnan," said Raoul. "For a moment, and I cannot help confessing it, I trembled lest you had come here, not as M. d'Artagnan, but as captain of the musketeers."

"You are mad, my poor boy," cried D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter in which an exact observer might perhaps have desired a little more frankness. "So much the better," said Raoul.—"Yes, mad; and do you know what I would advise you to do?"—"Tell me, Monsieur; for the advice is

sure to be good, as it comes from you."—"Very well, then. I advise you, after your long journey from England, after your visit to M. de Guiche, after your visit to Madame, after your visit to Porthos, after your journey to Vincennes,—I advise you, I say, to take a few hours' rest; go and lie down, sleep for a dozen hours, and when you wake up, go and ride one of my horses until you have tired him to death." And drawing Raoul towards him, D'Artagnan embraced him as if he were his own child. Athos did the like; only, it was very apparent that the father's kiss was more tender and his embrace closer than those of the friend.

The young man again looked at his companions, endeavouring with the utmost strength of his intelligence to read what was in their minds; but his look was powerless upon the smiling countenance of the musketeer or upon the calm and composed features of the Comte de la Fère. "Where are you going, Raoul?" inquired the latter, seeing that Bragelonne was preparing to go out. "To my own apartments," replied Raoul, in his soft and sad voice.

"We shall be sure to find you there, then, if we should have anything to say to you?"—"Yes, Monsieur; but do you suppose it likely you will have something to say to me?"—"How can I tell?" said Athos.—"Yes, new consolations," said D'Artagnan, pushing him gently towards the door.

Raoul, observing the perfect composure which marked every gesture of his two friends, quitted the count's room, carrying away with him nothing but the individual feeling of his own particular distress. "Thank Heaven!" he said; "since that is the case, I need only think of myself." And wrapping himself in his cloak, in order to conceal from the passers-by in the streets his gloomy face, he started out to return to his own rooms, as he had promised Porthos. The two friends watched the young man as he walked away with a feeling akin to pity; only, each expressed it in a very different way. "Poor Raoul!" said Athos, sighing deeply.—"Poor Raoul!" said D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CXCIX

HEU! MISER!

"Poor Raoul!" Athos had said; "Poor Raoul!" D'Artagnan had said: to be pitied by both these men, Raoul must indeed have been most unhappy. And when he found himself alone, face to face as it were with his own troubles, leaving behind him the intrepid friend and the indulgent father; when he recalled the avowal of the king's affection, which had robbed him of Louise de la Vallière, whom he loved so deeply,—he felt his heart almost breaking; as indeed we all have at least once in our lives, at the first illusion destroyed, at the first love betrayed. "Oh," he murmured, "all is over then! Nothing is now left me in this world,—nothing to look for, nothing to hope for! Guiche has told me so; my father has told me so, and M. d'Artagnan likewise. Everything is a mere idle dream in this life. That future which I have been hopelessly pursuing for the last ten years, a dream! that union of our hearts, a dream! that life formed of love and happiness, a dream! Poor fool, to publish my dreams in the face of my friends and my enemies,—that my friends may be saddened by my troubles and my enemies may laugh at my sorrows! So my unhappiness will soon become a notorious disgrace, a public scandal; so to-morrow I shall be ignominiously pointed at."

Despite the composure which he had promised his father and D'Artagnan to observe, Raoul could not resist uttering a few words of dark menace. "And yet," he continued, "if my name were De Wardes, and if I had the pliant character and strength of will of M. d'Artagnan, I should laugh, with my lips at least; I should convince other women that this perfidious girl, honoured by my love, leaves me only one regret,—that of having been deceived by her counterfeit of honesty. Some men might perhaps make favour with the king at my expense: I should put myself on the track of those jesters; I should chastise a few of them,—the men would fear me, and by the time I had laid three at my feet I should be adored by the women. Yes, yes; that indeed would be the proper course to adopt, and the Comte de la Fère himself would not object to it. Has not he also been tried, in his earlier days, in the same manner as I have just been tried myself? Did he not replace

love by intoxication? He has often told me so. Why should not I replace love by pleasure? He must have suffered as much as I suffer,—even more so, perhaps. The history of one man is the history of all men,—a lengthened trial, of greater or less duration, more or less bitter or sorrowful. The voice of human nature is nothing but one prolonged cry. But what are the sufferings of others compared to those from which I am now suffering? Does the open wound in another's breast soften the pain of the gaping wound in our own? Or does the blood which is welling from another man's side stanch that which is pouring from our own? Does the general anguish of our fellow-creatures lessen our own private and particular anguish? No, no; each suffers on his own account, each struggles with his own grief, each sheds his own tears. And besides, what has my life been up to the present moment? A cold, barren, sterile arena, in which I have always fought for others, never for myself,—sometimes for a king, sometimes for a woman. The king has betrayed me; the woman disdained me. Miserable, unhappy wretch that I am! Women! Can I not make all expiate the crime of one of their sex? What does that require? To have a heart no longer, or to forget that I ever had one; to be strong, even against weakness itself; to lean always, even when one feels that the support is giving way. What is needed to attain that result? To be young, handsome, strong, valiant, rich. I am, or shall be, all that. But, honour? What is honour, after all? A theory which every man understands in his own way. My father tells me: 'Honour is the consideration of what is due to others, and particularly of what one owes to one's self.' But De Guiche and Manicamp, and De Saint-Aignan particularly, would say to me, 'Honour consists in serving the passions and pleasures of one's king.' Honour such as that, indeed, is easy and productive enough. With honour like that I can keep my post at the court, become a gentleman of the chamber, and have the command of a regiment. With honour such as that, I can be both duke and peer. The stain which that woman has just stamped upon me, the grief with which she has just broken my heart,—mine, Raoul's, her friend from childhood,—in no way affect M. de Bragelonne, an excellent officer, a courageous leader, who will cover himself with glory at the first encounter, and who will become a hundred times greater than Mademoiselle de la Vallière is to-day, the mistress of the king; for the king will not marry her,—and the more publicly he proclaims her as his mistress, the more will he enlarge the band

Digitized by Google

of shame which he places as a crown upon her brow; and when others shall despise her as I despise her, I shall have become famous. Alas! we had walked together side by side, she and I, during the earliest, the brightest, and best portion of our existence, hand in hand along the charming path of life, covered with the flowers of youth; and now we come to a cross road, where she separates herself from me, whence we shall follow different roads, which will lead us always farther apart. And to attain the end of this path, oh, Heaven! I am alone, I am in despair, I am crushed. Oh, unhappy man that I am!"

Such were the sinister reflections in which Raoul was indulging when his foot mechanically paused at the door of his own dwelling. He had reached it without noticing the streets through which he had passed, without knowing how he had come; he pushed open the door, continued to advance, and ascended the staircase. The staircase, as in most of the houses at that period, was very dark, and the landings were obscure. Raoul lived on the first floor; he paused in order to ring. Olivain appeared, and took Raoul's sword and cloak from his hands. Raoul himself opened the door which from the antechamber led into a small salon, richly furnished enough for the salon of a young man, and completely filled with flowers by Olivain, who knowing his master's tastes had shown himself studiously attentive in gratifying them without caring whether his master perceived his attention or not. There was a portrait of La Vallière in the salon, which had been drawn by herself and given by her to Raoul. This portrait, fastened above a large easy-chair covered with dark-coloured damask, was the first point towards which Raoul bent his steps, the first object on which he fixed his eyes. It was, moreover, Raoul's usual habit to do so; every time he entered his room, this portrait, before anything else, attracted his attention. This time, as usual, he walked straight up to the portrait, placed his knees upon the arm-chair, and paused to look at it sadly. His arms here crossed upon his breast, his head slightly thrown back, his eyes filled with tears, his lips curved in a bitter smile. He looked at the portrait of her whom he so tenderly loved; and then all that he had said passed before his mind again, and all that he had suffered assailed his heart. After a long silence he murmured for the third time, "Miserable, unhappy wretch that I am!"

He had hardly pronounced these words, when he heard the sound of a sigh and a groan behind him. He turned sharply

Digitized by Google

round, and perceived in the angle of the salon, standing up, a bending veiled female figure, which the opening door had concealed as he entered, and which, since he had not turned around, he had not perceived. He advanced towards this figure, whose presence in his room had not been announced to him; and as he bowed, and inquired at the same moment who she was, she suddenly raised her head, and removed the veil from her face, revealing her pale and sorrow-stricken features. Raoul staggered back, as if he had seen a ghost. "Louise!" he cried, in a tone of such despair as one could hardly believe the human voice could express without breaking all the fibres of the heart.

CHAPTER CC

WOUNDS UPON WOUNDS

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIERE (for it was indeed she) advanced a few steps towards him. "Yes—Louise," she murmured.

But this interval, short as it had been, was quite sufficient for Raoul to recover himself. "You, Mademoiselle?" he said; and then added, in an indefinable tone, "You here!"—"Yes, Raoul," the young girl replied; "I have been waiting for you."—"I beg your pardon. When I came into the room I was not aware—"—"I know—but I entreated Olivain not to tell you—"

Louise hesitated; and as Raoul did not attempt to interrupt her, a moment's silence ensued, during which the sound of their throbbing hearts might have been heard, no longer in unison with each other, but the one beating as violently as the other. It was for Louise to speak, and she made an effort to do so. "I wished to speak to you," she said. "It was absolutely necessary that I should see you—myself—alone. I have not hesitated to adopt a step which must remain secret; for no one, except yourself, could understand my motive, M. de Bragelonne."

"In fact, Mademoiselle," Raoul stammered out, almost breathless from emotion, "so far as I am concerned, and despite the good opinion you have of me, I confess—"—"Will you do me the great kindness to sit down and listen to me?" said Louise, interrupting him with her soft, sweet voice. Bragelonne looked at her for a moment; then, mournfully shaking his head, he sat, or rather fell down, on a chair. "Speak!" he said.

Louise cast a glance all round her. This look was a timid

entreaty, and implored secrecy far more effectually than her expressed words had done a few minutes before. Raoul rose, and went to the door, which he opened. "Olivain," he said, "I am not within for any one;" and then, turning towards Louise, he added, "Is not that what you wished?"

Nothing could have produced a greater effect upon Louise than these few words which seemed to signify, "You see that I still understand you." She passed a handkerchief across her eyes, in order to remove a rebellious tear; and then, having collected herself for a moment, she said: "Raoul, do not turn your kind, frank look away from me! You are not one of those men who despise a woman for having given her heart to another, even though that love might render him unhappy or might wound his pride." Raoul did not reply. "Alas!" continued La Vallière, "it is only too true. My cause is a bad one, and I know not in what way to begin. It will be better for me, I think, to relate to you very simply everything that has befallen me. As I shall speak the truth, I shall always find my path clear before me in the obscurity, hesitation, and obstacles which I have to brave in order to solace my heart, which is full to overflowing, and wishes to pour itself out at your feet."

Raoul continued to preserve the same unbroken silence. La Vallière looked at him with an air that seemed to say, "Encourage me; for pity's sake, but a single word!" But Raoul did not open his lips; and the young girl was obliged to continue. "Just now," she said, "M. de Saint-Aignan came to me by the king's directions." She cast down her eyes as she said this; while Raoul, on his side, turned his away, in order to avoid looking at her. "M. de Saint-Aignan came to me from the king," she repeated, "and told me that you knew all;" and she attempted to look Raoul in the face, after inflicting this further wound upon him in addition to the many others he had already received; but it was impossible to meet Raoul's eyes.

"He told me you were incensed with me,—justly so, I admit." This time Raoul looked at the young girl, and a smile full of disdain passed across his lips. "Oh," she continued, "I entreat you, do not say that you have had any other feeling against me than that of anger merely! Raoul, wait until I have told you all,—wait until I have said to you all that I had to say, all that I came to say!"

Raoul, by the strength of his own iron will, forced his features

to assume a calmer expression; and the disdainful smile upon his lip passed away. "In the first place," said La Vallière,—"in the first place, with my hands raised in entreaty towards you, with my forehead bowed to the ground before you, I entreat you, as the most generous, as the noblest of men, to pardon, to forgive me. If I have left you in ignorance of what was passing in my own bosom, never, at least, would I have consented to deceive you. Oh, I entreat you, Raoul,—I implore you on my knees,—answer me one word, even though you wrong me in doing so! Better an injurious word from your lips than a suspicion in your heart!"

"I admire your subtlety of expression, Mademoiselle," said Raoul, making an effort to remain calm. "To leave another in ignorance that you are deceiving him is loyal; but to deceive him—it seems that that would be very wrong, and that you would not do it."—"Monsieur, for a long time I thought that I loved you better than anything else; and so long as I believed in my love for you, I told you that I loved you. At Blois I loved you. The king visited Blois; I believed I loved you still. I could have sworn it on the altar; but a day came when I was undeceived."

"Well, on that day, Mademoiselle, knowing that I still continued to love you, true loyalty of conduct ought to have obliged you to tell me you had ceased to love me."—"But on that day, Raoul,—on that day, when I read in the depths of my own heart, when I confessed to myself that you no longer filled my mind entirely, when I saw another future before me than that of being your friend, your life-long companion, your wife,—on that day, Raoul, you were not, alas! any more beside me."

"But you knew where I was, Mademoiselle; you could have written to me."—"Raoul, I did not dare to do so. Raoul, I have been weak and cowardly. I knew you so thoroughly—I knew how devotedly you loved me—that I trembled at the bare idea of the grief I was going to cause you; and that is so true, Raoul, that at this very moment I am now speaking to you, bending thus before you, my heart crushed in my bosom, my voice full of sighs, my eyes full of tears,—it is so perfectly true, that I have no other defence than my frankness, I have no other sorrow greater than that which I read in your eyes."

Raoul attempted to smile. "No," said the young girl, with a profound conviction, "no, no; you will not do me so foul a wrong as to disguise your feelings before me now! You loved me, you were sure of your affection for me, you did not

deceive yourself, you did not lie to your own heart; while I—I—" And pale as death, her arms thrown despairingly above her head, she fell upon her knees. "While you," said Raoul,—"you told me you loved me, and yet you loved another."

"Alas, yes!" cried the poor girl,—"alas, yes! I do love another; and that other—oh, for Heaven's sake, let me say it, Raoul, for it is my only excuse—that other I love better than my own life, better than my own soul even. Forgive my fault or punish my treason, Raoul. I came here in no way to defend myself, but merely to say to you, 'You know what it is to love!' Well, I love! I love to that degree that I would give my life, my very soul, to the man I love. If he should ever cease to love me, I shall die of grief and despair, unless God helps me, unless the Lord shows pity upon me. Raoul, I came here to submit myself to your will, whatever it might be,—to die, if it were your wish I should die. Kill me, then, Raoul, if in your heart you believe I deserve death!"

"Take care, Mademoiselle!" said Raoul; "the woman who invites death is one who has nothing but her heart's blood to offer to her deceived and betrayed lover."—"You are right," she said. Raoul uttered a deep sigh as he exclaimed, "And you love without being able to forget!"—"I love without a wish to forget, without a wish ever to love any one else," replied La Vallière.

"Very well," said Raoul. "You have said to me, in fact, all you had to say, all I could possibly wish to know. And now, Mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness; for it is I who have almost been an obstacle in your life. I, too, have been wrong; for in deceiving myself I helped to deceive you."—"Oh," said La Vallière, "I do not ask you so much as that, Raoul!"—"I only am to blame, Mademoiselle," continued Raoul. "Better informed than yourself of the difficulties of this life, I should have enlightened you. I ought not to have relied upon uncertainty; I ought to have extracted an answer from your heart, while I hardly even sought an acknowledgment from your lips. Once more, Mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness."

"Impossible, impossible!" she cried; "you are mocking me."—"How, impossible?"—"Yes, it is impossible to be good and excellent and perfect to such a degree as that."—"Take care!" said Raoul, with a bitter smile; "for presently you may say perhaps that I did not love you."

"Oh, you love me like an affectionate brother; let me hope

that, Raoul."—"As a brother! Undeceive yourself, Louise! I loved you as a lover, as a husband, with the deepest, the truest, the fondest affection."—"Raoul, Raoul!"—"As a brother! Oh, Louise! I loved you so much that I would have given all my blood for you, drop by drop; all my flesh, shred by shred; all my eternity, hour by hour."—"Raoul! Raoul! for pity's sake!"—"I loved you so much, Louise, that my heart is dead, my faith is extinguished, my eyes have lost their light. I loved you so much that I see nothing more either on earth or in heaven."

"Raoul, dear Raoul! spare me, I implore you!" cried La Vallière. "Oh, if I had known—"—"It is too late, Louise. You love, you are happy; I read your happiness through your tears,—behind the tears which the loyalty of your nature makes you shed; I feel the sighs which your love breathes forth. Louise, Louise, you have made me the most abjectly wretched man living; leave me, I entreat you! Adieu! adieu!"—"Forgive me, I entreat you!"—"Have I not done more? Have I not told you that I love you still?" She buried her face in her hands. "And to tell you that,—do you understand me, Louise?—to tell you that at such a moment as this, to tell you that as I have told you, is to pronounce my own sentence of death. Adieu!"

La Vallière wished to hold out her hands to him. "We ought not to see each other again in this world," he said; and as she was on the point of calling out in bitter agony at this remark, he placed his hand on her mouth to stifle the exclamation. She pressed her lips upon it and fell fainting.

"Olivain," said Raoul, "take this young lady and bear her to the carriage which is waiting for her at the door." As Olivain lifted her up, Raoul made a movement towards La Vallière, as if to give her a first and last kiss; but stopping abruptly, he said, "No, she is not mine; I am not the King of France, to steal!" And he returned to his room; while the lackey carried La Vallière, still fainting, to the carriage.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCI

WHAT RAOUL HAD GUESSED

After Raoul's departure, and the two exclamations which had followed him, Athos and D'Artagnan found themselves alone, face to face. Athos immediately resumed the earnest manner which had possessed him when D'Artagnan arrived. "Well," Athos said, "what have you come to announce to me, my friend?"—"I?" inquired D'Artagnan.—"Yes; I do not see you in this way without some reason for it," said Athos, smiling. —"The deuce!" said D'Artagnan.

"I will place you at your ease. The king is furious, is he not?"—"Well, I must say he is not altogether pleased."—"And you have come—"—"By his direction; yes."—"To arrest me, then?"—"My dear friend, you have hit the very mark."—"Oh, I expected it! Come!"

"Oh! oh! The devil!" said D'Artagnan; "what a hurry you are in!"—"I am afraid of delaying you," said Athos, smiling.

"I have plenty of time. Are you not curious, besides, to know how things went on between the king and me?"—"If you will be good enough to tell me, I will listen with the greatest pleasure," said Athos, pointing out to D'Artagnan a large chair, in which the latter stretched himself in an easy attitude.

"Well, I will do so willingly enough," continued D'Artagnan, "for the conversation is rather interesting. In the first place, the king sent for me."—"As soon as I had left?"—"You were just going down the last steps of the staircase, as the musketeers told me. I arrived. My dear Athos, the king was not red in the face merely, he was positively purple. I was not aware, of course, of what had passed; only I saw a sword broken in two lying on the floor. 'Captain d'Artagnan,' cried the king, as soon as he saw me. 'Sire,' I replied. 'I abandon M. de la Fère; he is an insolent man.' 'An insolent man!' I exclaimed, in such a tone that the king stopped suddenly short. 'Captain d'Artagnan,' resumed the king, with his teeth clinched, 'you will listen to me and obey me.' 'That is my duty, Sire.' 'I have wished to spare that gentleman, of whom I retain some kind recollections, the affront of having him arrested in my presence.' 'Ah! ah!' I said quietly. 'But you will take

a carriage.' At this I made a slight movement. 'If you object to arrest him yourself,' continued the king, 'send me my captain of the guards.' 'Sire,' I replied, 'there is no necessity for the captain of the guards, since I am on duty.' 'I should not like to annoy you,' said the king, kindly, 'for you have always served me well, M. d'Artagnan.' 'You do not annoy me, Sire,' I replied; 'I am on duty, that is all.' 'But,' said the king, in astonishment, 'I believe the count is your friend?' 'If he were my father, Sire, it would not make me less on duty than I am.' The king looked at me; he saw how unmoved my face was, and seemed satisfied. 'You will arrest M. le Comte de la Fère, then?' he inquired. 'Most certainly, Sire, if you give me the order to do so.' 'Very well; I order you to do so.' I bowed and replied, 'Where is the count, Sire?' 'You will look for him.' 'And I am to arrest him wherever he may be?' 'Yes; but at his own house if possible. If he has started for his own estate, leave Paris at once, and arrest him on his way thither.' I bowed; but as I did not move, he said, 'Well?' 'I am waiting, Sire.' 'What are you waiting for?' 'For the signed order.' The king seemed annoyed; for in point of fact it was the exercise of a fresh act of authority,—a repetition of the arbitrary act, if indeed it is to be considered as such. He took his pen slowly, and in no very good temper; then he wrote, 'Order for M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of my musketeers, to arrest M. le Comte de la Fère, wherever he is to be found.' He then turned towards me; but I was looking on without moving a muscle of my face. In all probability he thought he perceived something like bravado in my tranquil manner, for he signed hurriedly; and then handing me the order, he said, 'Go!' I obeyed; and here I am."

Athos pressed his friend's hand. "Well, let us set off," he said. "Oh! surely," said D'Artagnan, "you must have some trifling matters to arrange before you leave your apartments in this manner?"—"I? Not at all."—"Why not?"—"Why, you know, D'Artagnan, I have always been a very simple traveller on this earth, ready to go to the end of the world by the order of my sovereign, ready to quit it at the summons of my Maker. What does a man who is thus prepared require in such a case?—a portmanteau or a shroud. I am ready at this moment, as I have always been, dear friend, and can accompany you at once."

"But Bragelonne—"—"I have brought him up in the same principles I laid down for my own guidance; and you observed

that as soon as he perceived you he guessed, that very moment, the motive of your visit. We have thrown him off his guard for a moment; but do not be uneasy,—he is sufficiently prepared for my disgrace not to be too much alarmed at it. So, let us go."—"Very well, let us go," said D'Artagnan, quietly.

"As I broke my sword in the king's presence, and threw the pieces at his feet, I presume that will dispense with the necessity of delivering it over to you."—"You are quite right; and besides that, what the devil do you suppose I could do with your sword?"

"Am I to walk behind or before you?" inquired Athos, laughing.—"You will walk arm-in-arm with me," replied D'Artagnan, as he took the count's arm to descend the staircase; and in this manner they arrived at the landing. Grimaud, whom they had met in the anteroom, looked at them, as they went out together in this manner, with some little uneasiness; his experience of affairs was quite sufficient to give him good reason to suspect that there was something wrong.

"Ah! is that you, Grimaud?" said Athos, kindly. "We are going—"—"To take a turn in my carriage," interrupted D'Artagnan, with a friendly nod of the head. Grimaud thanked D'Artagnan by a grimace, which was evidently intended for a smile, and accompanied the two friends to the door. Athos entered first into the carriage; D'Artagnan followed him, without saying a word to the coachman. The departure had taken place so quietly that it excited no disturbance or attention even in the neighbourhood. When the carriage had reached the quays, "You are taking me to the Bastille, I perceive," said Athos.

"I?" said D'Artagnan. "I take you wherever you may choose to go; nowhere else, I can assure you."—"What do you mean?" said the count, surprised. "*Pardieu!*" said D'Artagnan, "you quite understand that I undertook the mission with no other object in view than that of carrying it out exactly as you liked. You did not think that I would have you thrown into prison like that, brutally, without reflection. If I had anticipated that, I should have let the captain of the guards undertake it."

"And so—" said Athos. "And so, I repeat, we will go wherever you may choose."—"My dear friend," said Athos, embracing D'Artagnan, "how like you that is!"

"Well, it seems simple enough to me. The coachman will take you to the barrier of the Cours-la-Reine; you will find

Digitized by Google

a horse there which I have ordered to be kept ready for you; with that horse you will be able to do three posts without stopping; and I, on my side, will take care not to return to the king, to tell him that you have gone away, until it will be impossible to overtake you. In the meantime you will have reached Havre, and from Havre you will go to England, where you will find the charming residence which my friend M. Monk gave me,—to say nothing of the hospitality which King Charles will not fail to show you. Well, what do you think of this project?"—"Take me to the Bastille," said Athos, smiling.

"You are an obstinate-headed fellow, dear Athos," returned D'Artagnan; "reflect for a few moments."—"Upon what?"—"That you are no longer twenty years of age. Believe me,—I speak according to my own knowledge and experience,—a prison is certain death for men of our time of life. No, no; I will never allow you to languish in prison. Why, the very thought of it turns my head."

"Dear D'Artagnan," Athos replied, "happily God made me as strong in body as in mind; and rely upon it, I shall retain my strength up to the very last moment."—"But this is not force; it is folly."—"No, D'Artagnan, it is the highest order of reasoning. Do not suppose that I should in the slightest degree in the world discuss the question with you, whether you would not be ruined in endeavouring to save me. I should have done precisely as you have arranged, if flight had seemed proper to me; I should therefore have accepted from you what without any doubt you would have accepted from me. No! I know you too well even to breathe a word upon the subject."

"Ah, if you would only let me do it," said D'Artagnan, "how I would send the king running after you!"—"He is the king, dear friend."—"Oh, that is all the same to me; and king though he be, I would plainly tell him, 'Sire! imprison, exile, kill every one in France and Europe; order me to arrest, and even poniard whom you like,—even were it Monsieur, your own brother; but do not touch one of the four musketeers, or, if so, *mordioux!*'"

"My dear friend," replied Athos, quietly, "I should like to persuade you of one thing; namely, that I wish to be arrested,—that I desire above all things that my arrest should take place." D'Artagnan made a movement of his shoulders. "What does that mean? It is so. If you were to let me escape, it would be only to return of my own accord, and constitute myself a prisoner. I wish to prove to this young man, who is dazzled

by the power and splendour of his crown, that he can be regarded as the first among men only by proving himself to be the most generous and the wisest among them. He may punish, imprison, or torture me,—it matters not. He abuses his opportunities, and I wish him to learn the bitterness of remorse, while Heaven teaches him what a chastisement is."

"Well, well," replied D'Artagnan, "I know only too well that when you have once said 'No,' you mean 'No.' I do not insist any longer. You wish to go to the Bastille?"—"I do wish to go there."—"Let us go, then! To the Bastille!" cried D'Artagnan to the coachman; and throwing himself back in the carriage, he gnawed the ends of his moustache with a fury which to Athos, who knew him well, signified a resolution either already taken or in course of formation. A profound silence ensued in the carriage, which continued to roll on, but neither faster nor slower than before.

Athos took the musketeer by the hand. "You are not angry with me, D'Artagnan?" he said.—"I? Oh, no! certainly not, of course not! What you do from heroism, I should have done from sheer obstinacy."—"But you are quite of opinion, are you not, that Heaven will avenge me, D'Artagnan?"—"And I know some persons on earth who will lend a helping hand," said the captain.

CHAPTER CCII

THREE GUESTS ASTONISHED TO FIND THEMSELVES AT SUPPER TOGETHER

The carriage arrived at the outside gate of the Bastille. A soldier on guard stopped it; but D'Artagnan had only to utter a single word to procure admittance, and the carriage passed on. While they were proceeding along the covered way which led to the courtyard of the governor's residence, D'Artagnan, whose lynx eye saw everything, even through the walls, suddenly cried out, "What is that out yonder?"

"Well," said Athos, quietly, "what is it?"—"Look yonder, Athos!"—"In the courtyard?"—"Yes, yes; make haste!"—"Well, a carriage; very likely conveying a prisoner like myself."—"That would be too droll."—"I do not understand you."—"Make haste and look again, and look at the man who is just getting out of that carriage."

Digitized by Google

At that very moment a second sentinel stopped D'Artagnan; and while the formalities were gone through, Athos could see at a hundred paces from him the man whom his friend had pointed out to him. He was, in fact, getting out of the carriage at the door of the governor's house. "Well," inquired D'Artagnan, "do you see him?"—"Yes; he is a man in a grey suit."—"What do you say of him?"—"I cannot very well tell. He is, as I have just now told you, a man in a grey suit, who is getting out of a carriage; that is all."—"Athos, I will wager anything it is he."—"He?—who?"—"Aramis."

"Aramis arrested? Impossible!"—"I do not say he is arrested, since we see him alone in his carriage."—"Well, then, what is he doing here?"—"Oh, he knows Baisemeaux, the governor!" replied the musketeer, slyly. "My faith! we have arrived just in time."—"What for?"—"In order to see what we can see."

"I regret this meeting exceedingly. When Aramis sees me, he will be very much annoyed,—in the first place at seeing me, and in the next at being seen."—"Very well reasoned."—"Unfortunately, there is no remedy for it. Whenever any one meets another in the Bastille, even if he wished to draw back to avoid him, it would be impossible."

"Athos, I have an idea: the question is, to spare Aramis the annoyance you were speaking of, is it not?"—"What is to be done?"—"I will tell you; or, in order better to explain myself, let me relate the affair in my own manner. I will not recommend you to tell a falsehood, for that would be impossible for you to do."—"Well, what is it?"—"Well, I will lie for both of us; it is so easy to do that, with the nature and habits of a Gascon."

Athos smiled. The carriage stopped where the one we have just now pointed out had stopped; namely, at the door of the governor's house. "It is understood, then?" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice to his friend. Athos consented by a gesture.

They ascended the staircase. There will be no occasion for surprise at the facility with which they had entered into the Bastille, if it be remembered that before passing the first gate —in fact, the most difficult of all—D'Artagnan had announced that he had brought a prisoner of State. At the third gate, on the contrary,—that is to say, when he had once fairly entered the prison,—he merely said to the sentinel, "To M. Baisemeaux;" and they both passed on. In a few minutes they were in the governor's dining-room; and the first face which attracted

D'Artagnan's observation was that of Aramis, who was seated side by side with Baisemeaux, and awaited the announcement of a good meal, whose odour impregnated the whole apartment. If D'Artagnan pretended surprise, Aramis did not pretend at all; he started when he saw his two friends, and his emotion was very apparent. Athos and D'Artagnan, however, made their salutations; and Baisemeaux, amazed, completely stupefied by the presence of those three guests, began to perform a few evolutions around them.

"Ah, there!" said Aramis, "by what chance—"—"We were just going to ask you," retorted D'Artagnan.—"Are we going to give ourselves up as prisoners?" cried Aramis, with an affectation of hilarity.—"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan; "it is true the walls smell deucedly like a prison. M. de Baisemeaux, you know you invited me to sup with you the other day."—"I?" cried Baisemeaux.—"Ah! one would say you had fallen from the clouds. You have no recollection of it?"

Baisemeaux turned pale and then red; looked at Aramis, who looked at him; and finally stammered, "Certainly—I am delighted—but—upon my honour—I have not the slightest—Ah! I have such a wretched memory."—"Well, I am wrong, I see," said D'Artagnan, as if he were offended.—"Wrong, how?"—"Wrong to remember, it seems."

Baisemeaux hurried towards him. "Do not stand on ceremony, my dear captain," he said. "I have the poorest head in the kingdom. Take me from my pigeons and their pigeon-house, and I am no better than the rawest recruit."—"At all events, you remember it now," said D'Artagnan, boldly.—"Yes, yes," replied the governor, hesitating; "I think I remember."

"It was when you came to the palace to see me; you told me some story or other about your accounts with M. de Louvière and M. de Tremblay."—"Oh, yes! perfectly."—"And about M. d'Herblay's kindness to you."—"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis, looking the unhappy governor full in the face; "and yet you just now said you had no memory, M. de Baisemeaux."

Baisemeaux interrupted the musketeer in the midst of his revelations. "Yes, yes, you're quite right; it seems to me that I am still there. I beg a thousand pardons. But now, once for all, my dear M. d'Artagnan, be sure that at this present time, as at any other, whether invited or not, you are master here,—you and M. d'Herblay, your friend," he said, turning towards Aramis; "and this gentleman too," he added, bowing to Athos.

"Well, I thought it would be sure to turn out so," replied D'Artagnan. "This is the occasion of my coming: Having nothing to do this evening at the Palais-Royal, I wished to judge for myself what your ordinary style of living was like; and as I was coming along I met Monsieur the Count." Athos bowed. "The count, who had just left his Majesty, handed me an order which required immediate attention. We were close by here; I wished to call in, even if it were for no other object than that of shaking hands with you and of presenting the count to you, of whom you spoke so highly in the king's presence that very evening when—"

"Certainly, certainly—M. le Comte de la Fère, is it not?"—"Precisely."—"Monsieur the Count is welcome."—"And he will sup with you two, I suppose; while I, unfortunate dog that I am, must run off on a matter of duty. Oh, what happy beings you are, compared to myself!" D'Artagnan added, sighing as loud as Porthos might have done.

"And so you are going away?" said Aramis and Baisemeaux together, with the same expression of delighted surprise, the tone of which was immediately noticed by D'Artagnan. "I leave you in my place," he said, "a noble and excellent guest;" and he touched Athos gently on the shoulder, who, astonished also, could not help exhibiting his surprise a little,—which was noticed by Aramis only, for M. de Baisemeaux was not quite equal to the three friends in point of intelligence.

"What! are you going to leave us?" resumed the governor. —"I shall be away only about an hour or an hour and a half. I will return in time for dessert."—"Oh, we will wait for you!" said Baisemeaux.—"No, no; that would be really disobliging me."—"You will be sure to return, though?" said Athos, with an expression of doubt.—"Most certainly," he said, pressing his friend's hand confidentially; and he added in a low voice, "Wait for me, Athos; be cheerful and lively as possible, and above all, don't allude to business affairs, for Heaven's sake!" and a renewed pressure of the hand impressed upon the count the necessity of being discreet and impenetrable.

Baisemeaux led D'Artagnan to the gate. Aramis, with many friendly protestations of delight, sat down by Athos, determined to make him speak; but Athos possessed all the virtues in their highest excellence. If necessity had required it, he would have been the finest orator in the world; but when there was need of silence he would die rather than utter a syllable.

Ten minutes after D'Artagnan's departure, the three gentle-

Digitized by Google

men sat down to table, which was covered with the most substantial display of gastronomic luxury. Large joints, exquisite dishes, preserves, the greatest variety of wines, appeared successively upon the table, which was served at the king's expense, and of which expense M. Colbert would have no difficulty in saving two-thirds, without any one in the Bastille being the worse for it. Baisemeaux was the only one who ate and drank resolutely. Aramis allowed nothing to pass by him, but merely touched everything he took; Athos, after the soup and three *hors d'œuvres*, ate nothing more. The style of conversation was such as it necessarily would be between three men so opposite in temper and ideas.

Aramis was incessantly asking himself by what extraordinary chance Athos was at Baisemeaux's when D'Artagnan was no longer there, and why D'Artagnan did not remain when Athos was there. Athos sounded all the depths of the mind of Aramis, who lived in the midst of subterfuge, evasion, and intrigue; he studied his man well and thoroughly, and felt convinced that he was engaged upon some important project. And then he too began to think of his own personal affair, and to lose himself in conjectures as to D'Artagnan's reason for having left the Bastille so abruptly, and for leaving behind him a prisoner so badly introduced and so badly looked after by the prison authorities. But we shall not pause to examine into the thoughts and feelings of these personages; we will leave them to themselves, surrounded by the remains of poultry, game, and fish, mutilated by the generous knife of Baisemeaux. We are going to follow D'Artagnan instead, who, getting into the carriage which had brought him, cried out to the coachman, "To the king! and burn the pavement!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCIII

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE LOUVRE DURING THE SUPPER AT THE BASTILLE

M. DE SAINT-AIGNAN had executed the commission with which the king had entrusted him for La Vallière, as we have already seen in one of the preceding chapters; but whatever his eloquence might have been, he did not succeed in persuading the young girl that she had in the king a protector powerful enough for her under any combination of circumstances, and that she had no need of any one else in the world when the king was on her side. In point of fact, at the very first word which the favourite mentioned of the discovery of the famous secret, Louise, in a passion of tears, abandoned herself in utter despair to a sorrow which would have been far from flattering for the king, if he had been a witness of it from a corner of the room. De Saint-Aignan, in his character of ambassador, felt greatly offended at it, as his master himself would have been, and returned to announce to the king what he had seen and heard. It is there that we now find him, in a state of great agitation, in the presence of the king, still more agitated than he.

"But," said the king to the courtier, when the latter had finished his report, "what did she decide to do? Shall I, at least, see her presently before supper? Will she come to me, or shall I be obliged to go to her room?"—"I believe, Sire, that if your Majesty wishes to see her, you will not only have to take the first step in advance, but will have to go the whole way."

"Nothing for me! Does that Bragelonne still possess her heart?" muttered the king between his teeth.—"Oh, Sire, that is not possible; for it is you alone whom Mademoiselle de la Vallière loves, and that, too, with all her heart. But you know that De Bragelonne belongs to that proud race who play the part of Roman heroes." The king smiled feebly; he knew how true the illustration was, for Athos had just left him. "As for Mademoiselle de la Vallière," De Saint-Aignan continued, "she was brought up under the care of the Dowager Madame; that is to say, in austere retirement. This engaged young couple coldly exchanged their little vows in the presence of the moon and the stars; and now, when they find they have to break those vows, it plays the very deuce with them."

Digitized by Google

De Saint-Aignan thought he should have made the king laugh; but on the contrary, from a mere smile Louis passed to the greatest seriousness of manner. He already began to experience that remorse which the count had promised D'Artagnan he would inflict upon him. He reflected that, in fact, these young persons had loved and sworn fidelity to each other; that one of the two had kept his word, and that the other was too conscientious not to feel her perjury most bitterly; and with remorse, jealousy sharply pricked the king's heart. He did not say another word; and instead of going to pay a visit to his mother or the queen or Madame, in order to amuse himself a little and make the ladies laugh, as he himself used to say, he threw himself into the huge arm-chair in which his august father, Louis XIII., had passed so many weary days and years in company with Baradas and Cinq-Mars.

De Saint-Aignan perceived that the king was not to be amused at that moment; he tried a last resource, and pronounced Louise's name, which made the king look up immediately. "What does your Majesty intend to do this evening? Shall Mademoiselle de la Vallière be informed of your intention to see her?"—"It seems she is already aware of that," replied the king. "No, no, Saint-Aignan," he continued, after a moment's pause; "we will both of us pass our time in dreaming. When Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall have sufficiently regretted what she now regrets, she will deign, perhaps, to give us some news of herself."—"Ah, Sire, is it possible you can so misunderstand that devoted heart?"

The king rose, flushed with vexation; he was a prey to jealousy in its turn. De Saint-Aignan was just beginning to feel that his position was becoming awkward, when the curtain before the door was raised. The king turned hastily round. His first idea was that a letter from Louise had arrived; but instead of a letter of love, he saw only his captain of musketeers standing upright and silent in the doorway. "M. d'Artagnan!" he said. "Ah! well, Monsieur?"

D'Artagnan looked at De Saint-Aignan; Louis's eyes took the same direction as those of his captain. These looks would have been clear to any one, and they were especially so to De Saint-Aignan. The courtier bowed and quitted the room, leaving the king and D'Artagnan alone. "Is it done?" inquired the king.—"Yes, Sire," replied the captain of the musketeers, in a grave voice, "it is done!"

The king was unable to say another word. Pride, however,

Digitized by Google

obliged him not to pause there. Whenever a sovereign has adopted a decisive course, even though it be unjust, he is compelled to prove to all witnesses, and particularly to himself, that he was quite right in so adopting it. A good means for effecting that—an almost infallible means, indeed—is to try to prove his victim to be in the wrong. Louis, brought up by Mazarin and Anne of Austria, knew better than any one else his vocation as a monarch; he therefore endeavoured to prove it on the present occasion. After a few moment's pause, which he had employed in making silently to himself the same reflections which we have just expressed aloud, he said in an indifferent tone, "What did the count say?"—"Nothing at all, Sire."—"Surely he did not allow himself to be arrested without saying something?"—"He said he expected to be arrested, Sire."

The king raised his head haughtily. "I presume," he said, "that M. le Comte de la Fère has not continued to play his obstinate and rebellious part?"—"In the first place, Sire, what do you term rebellious?" quietly asked the musketeer. "Is that man a rebel, in the eyes of the king, who not only allows himself to be shut up in the Bastille, but who even opposes those who do not wish to take him there?"

"Who do not wish to take him there!" exclaimed the king. "What do you say, Captain? Are you mad?"—"I believe not, Sire."—"You speak of persons who did not wish to arrest M. de la Fère?"—"Yes, Sire."—"And who are they?"—"Those whom your Majesty intrusted with that duty, apparently."—"But it is you whom I entrusted with it," exclaimed the king.—"Yes, Sire; it is I."

"And you say that, despite my orders, you had the intention of not arresting the man who had insulted me!"—"Yes, Sire, that was really my intention. I even proposed to the count to mount a horse that I had had prepared for him at the Barrière de la Conférence."—"And what was your object in getting this horse ready?"—"Why, Sire, in order that M. le Comte de la Fère might be able to reach Havre, and from that place make his escape to England."

"You betrayed me then, Monsieur?" cried the king, kindling with a wild pride.—"Exactly so."

There was nothing to say in answer to statements made in such a tone; the king was astounded at such an obstinate and open resistance on the part of D'Artagnan. "At least you had a reason, M. d'Artagnan, for acting as you did?" said the king,

proudly.—"I have always a reason, Sire."—"Your reason cannot be your friendship for the count, at all events,—the only one that can be of any avail, the only one that could possibly excuse you,—for I placed you entirely at your ease in that repect."

"Me, Sire?"—"Did I not give you the choice to arrest or not to arrest M. le Comte de la Fère?"—"Yes, Sire; but—"—"But what?" exclaimed the king, impatiently.—"But you warned me, Sire, that if I did not arrest him, your captain of the guards should do so."

"Was I not considerate enough towards you when I did not compel you to obey me?"—"To me, Sire, you were, but not to my friend; for my friend would be arrested all the same, whether by myself or by the captain of the guards."—"And this is your devotion, Monsieur,—a devotion which argues and reasons! You are no soldier, Monsieur!"—"I wait for your Majesty to tell me what I am."—"Well, then,—you are a Frondeur."—"And since there is no longer any Fronde, Sire, in that case—"

"But if what you say is true—"—"What I say is always true, Sire."—"What have you come to say to me, Monsieur?"—"I have come to say to your Majesty: Sire, M. de la Fère is in the Bastille."—"That is not your fault, it would seem."—"That is true, Sire. But, at all events, he is there; and since he is there, it is important that your Majesty should know it."

"Ah, M. d'Artagnan, so you set your king at defiance!"—"Sire—"—"M. d'Artagnan, I warn you that you are abusing my patience."—"On the contrary, Sire."—"What do you mean by 'on the contrary'?"—"I have come to get myself arrested too."

"To get yourself arrested,—you!"—"Of course. My friend will be lonely down there; and I have come to propose to your Majesty to permit me to bear him company. If your Majesty will but give the word, I will arrest myself; I shall not need the captain of the guards for that, I assure you."

The king darted towards the table and seized a pen to write the order for D'Artagnan's imprisonment. "Pay attention, Monsieur, that this is for ever!" cried the king, in a tone of stern menace.—"I can quite believe that," returned the musketeer; "for when you have once done such an act as that, you will never be able to look me in the face again." The king dashed down his pen violently. "Leave the room, Monsieur!" he said.

"Oh, not so, Sire, if it please your Majesty!"—"How not

so?"—"Sire, I came to speak temperately to your Majesty. Your Majesty got into a passion with me: that is a misfortune; but I shall not the less on that account say what I had to say to you."—"Your resignation, Monsieur,—your resignation!" cried the king.

"Sire, you know whether I care about my resignation or not, since at Blois, on the day when you refused King Charles the million which my friend the Comte de la Fère gave him, I tendered my resignation to your Majesty."—"Very well, then, do it at once!"—"No, Sire; for there is no question of my resignation at the present moment. Your Majesty took up your pen just now to send me to the Bastille,—why should you change your intention?"

"D'Artagnan! Gascon that you are! who is the king, allow me to ask,—you or myself?"—"You, Sire, unfortunately."—"What do you mean by 'unfortunately'?"—"Yes, Sire; for if it were I—"—"If it were you, you would approve of M. d'Artagnan's rebellious conduct, I suppose?"—"Certainly."

"Really?" said the king, shrugging his shoulders.—"And I should tell my captain of the musketeers," continued D'Artagnan,—"I should tell him, looking at him all the while with human eyes and not with eyes like coals of fire, 'M. d'Artagnan, I have forgotten that I am king; I have descended from my throne to insult a gentleman.'"

"Monsieur!" cried the king, "do you think you can excuse your friend by exceeding him in insolence?"—"Oh, Sire! I shall go much further than he did," said D'Artagnan; "and it will be your own fault. I shall tell you what he, a man full of delicacy, did not tell you; I shall say: 'Sire, you sacrificed his son, and he defended his son; you sacrificed him; he addressed you in the name of honour, of religion, of virtue,—you repulsed, pursued, imprisoned him.' I shall be harder than he was, for I shall say to you: 'Sire, choose! Do you wish to have friends or lackeys, soldiers or slaves, great men or puppets? Do you wish men to serve you or to crouch before you? Do you wish men to love you or to fear you? If you prefer baseness, intrigue, cowardice,—oh! say it, Sire! We will leave you,—we who are the only surviving illustrations, nay, I will say more, the only models of the valour of former times; we who have done our duty, and have exceeded, perhaps, in courage and in merit the men already great for posterity. Choose, Sire, and without delay! Whatever remains to you of the grand nobility, guard it with a jealous eye; of courtiers you will

Digitized by Google

always have enough. Delay not—and send me to the Bastille with my friend; for if you have not known how to listen to the Comte de la Fère, that is to say, to the most sweet and noble voice of honour; if you do not know how to listen to D'Artagnan, that is to say, to the most candid and rough voice of sincerity, —you are a bad king, and to-morrow will be a poor king. Now, bad kings are hated; poor kings are driven away.' That is what I had to say to you, Sire; you are wrong to have driven me to it."

The king threw himself back in his chair cold and livid. Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, he could not have been more astonished; he appeared as if his respiration had ceased, and as if he were at the point of death. That rough voice of sincerity, as D'Artagnan had called it, had pierced through his heart like a sword-blade. D'Artagnan had said all that he had to say. Comprehending the king's anger, he drew his sword, and approaching Louis XIV. respectfully, placed it on the table. But the king, with a furious gesture, thrust aside the sword, which fell on the ground and rolled to D'Artagnan's feet. Notwithstanding his mastery over himself, D'Artagnan too, in his turn, became pale and trembled with indignation. "A king," he said, "may disgrace a soldier,—he may exile him, and may even condemn him to death; but were he a hundred times a king, he has no right to insult him by casting dishonour on his sword! Sire, a king of France has never repulsed with contempt the sword of a man such as I am! Stained with disgrace as this sword now is, it has henceforth no other sheath than either your heart or my own. I choose my own, Sire; give thanks for it to God, and my patience." Then snatching up his sword, he cried, "My blood be upon your head!" and with a rapid gesture he placed the hilt upon the floor and directed the point of the blade towards his breast. The king, however, with a movement still more rapid than that of D'Artagnan, threw his right arm round the musketeer's neck, and with his left hand seized hold of the blade by the middle, and returned it silently to the scabbard. D'Artagnan, upright, pale, and still trembling, suffered the king to do all, without aiding him, to the very end. Then Louis, overcome, returned to the table, took a pen, wrote a few lines, signed them, and offered the paper to D'Artagnan.

"What is this paper, Sire?" inquired the captain.—"An order for M. d'Artagnan to set the Comte de la Fère at liberty immediately."

Digitized by Google

D'Artagnan seized the king's hand and kissed it; he then folded the order, placed it in his belt, and quitted the room. Neither the king nor the captain spoke a word. "Oh, human heart, director of kings!" murmured Louis, when alone; "when shall I learn to read in your recesses, as in the leaves of a book? No, I am not a bad king, nor am I a poor king; but I am still a child."

CHAPTER CCIV

POLITICAL RIVALS

D'Artagnan had promised M. de Baisemeaux to return in time for dessert, and he kept his word. They had just reached the finer and more delicate class of wines and liqueurs with which the governor's cellar had the reputation of being most admirably stocked, when the spurs of the captain resounded in the corridor, and he himself appeared at the threshold. Athos and Aramis had played a close game; neither had been able to gain the slightest advantage over the other. They had supped, talked a good deal about the Bastille, of the last journey to Fontainebleau, of the intended *fête* that M. Fouquet was about to give at Vaux; they had generalised on every possible subject, and no one, excepting Baisemeaux, had alluded to private matters.

D'Artagnan arrived in the very midst of the conversation, still pale and disturbed by his interview with the king. Baisemeaux hastened to give him a chair; D'Artagnan accepted a glass of wine, and set it down empty. Athos and Aramis both remarked his emotion; as for Baisemeaux, he saw nothing more than the captain of the king's musketeers, to whom he endeavoured to show every attention. To be near the king entitled any one to all privileges, in the eyes of M. de Baisemeaux.

But although Aramis had remarked that emotion, he had not been able to guess the cause of it. Athos alone believed that he had detected it. To him D'Artagnan's return, and particularly the manner in which he, usually so impassive, seemed overcome, signified, "I have just asked the king something which he has refused me." Thoroughly convinced that his conjecture was correct, Athos smiled, rose from the table, and made a sign to D'Artagnan, as if to remind him that they had something else to do than to sup together. D'Artagnan

immediately understood him, and replied by another sign. Aramis and Baisemeaux watched this silent dialogue, and looked inquiringly at each other. Athos felt that he was called upon to give an explanation of what was passing. "The truth is, my friends," said the Comte de la Fère, with a smile, "that you, Aramis, have been supping with a State criminal, and you, M. de Baisemeaux, with your prisoner."

Baisemeaux uttered an exclamation of surprise and almost of delight. That worthy man took pride in his fortress. Profit aside, the more prisoners he had, the happier he was; and the higher the prisoners were in rank, the prouder he felt. Aramis assumed an expression which he thought the situation required, and said: "Well, dear Athos, forgive me; but I almost suspected what has happened. Some prank of Raoul or La Vallière, is it not?"—"Alas!" said Baisemeaux.—"And," continued Aramis, "you, a high and powerful nobleman as you are, forgetful that there are now only courtiers,—you have been to the king, and told him what you thought of his conduct?"—"Yes, you have guessed right."

"So that," said Baisemeaux, trembling at having supped so familiarly with a man who had fallen into disgrace with the king,—"so that, Monsieur the Count—"—"So that, my dear governor," said Athos, "my friend D'Artagnan will communicate to you the contents of the paper which I perceive just peeping out of his belt, and which assuredly can be nothing else than the order for my incarceration."

Baisemeaux held out his hand with his accustomed eagerness. D'Artagnan drew two papers from his belt, and presented one of them to the governor, who unfolded it, and then read, in a low tone of voice, looking at Athos over the paper, as he did so, and pausing from time to time: "'Order to detain in my château of the Bastille M. le Comte de la Fère.' Oh, Monsieur! this is indeed a very melancholy honour for me."

"You will have a patient prisoner, Monsieur," said Athos, in his calm, soft voice.—"A prisoner, too, who will not remain a month with you, my dear governor," said Aramis; while Baisemeaux, still holding the order in his hand, transcribed it upon the prison registry.—"Not a day, or rather not even a night," said D'Artagnan, displaying the second order of the king; "for now, dear M. de Baisemeaux, you will have the goodness to transcribe also this order for setting the count immediately at liberty."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "it is a labour that you have spared

me, D'Artagnan;" and he pressed the musketeer's hand in a significant manner, and that of Athos at the same time.

"What!" said the latter, in astonishment, "the king sets me at liberty!"—"Read, my dear friend!" returned D'Artagnan. Athos took the order and read it. "It is quite true," he said.

"Are you sorry for it?" asked D'Artagnan.—"Oh, no, on the contrary! I wish the king no harm; and the greatest evil or misfortune that any one can wish kings is that they should commit an act of injustice. But you have had a difficult and painful task, I know. Tell me, have you not, D'Artagnan?"—"I? Not at all," said the musketeer, laughing; "the king does everything I wish him to do."

Aramis looked fixedly at D'Artagnan, and saw that he was not speaking the truth. But Baisemeaux had eyes for nothing but D'Artagnan, so great was his admiration for a man who could make the king do all he wished.

"And does the king exile Athos?" inquired Aramis.—"No, not precisely. The king did not explain himself upon that subject," replied D'Artagnan; "but I think the count could not do better, unless indeed he wishes particularly to thank the king—"—"No, indeed," replied Athos, smiling.

"Well, then, I think," resumed D'Artagnan, "that the count cannot do better than to retire to his own château. However, my dear Athos, you have only to speak, to tell me what you want. If any particular place of residence is more agreeable to you than another, I can obtain it for you."—"No, thank you," said Athos; "nothing can be more agreeable to me, my dear friend, than to return to the solitude beneath my noble trees on the banks of the Loire. If Heaven be the overruling physician of the evils of the mind, Nature is a sovereign remedy. And so, Monsieur," continued Athos, turning again towards Baisemeaux, "I am now free, I suppose?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Count, I think so,—at least, I hope so," said the governor, turning over and over the two papers in question; "unless, however, M. d'Artagnan has a third order to give me."—"No, my dear M. Baisemeaux, no," said the musketeer; "the second is quite enough. We can stop there."

"Ah! Monsieur the Count," said Baisemeaux, addressing Athos, "you do not know what you are losing. I should have placed you at thirty livres, like the generals—what am I saying? —I mean at fifty livres, like the princes; and you would have supped every evening as you have supped to-night."—"Allow me, Monsieur," said Athos, "to prefer my mediocrity;" and

then, turning to D'Artagnan, he said, "Let us go, my friend."—"Let us go," said D'Artagnan.

"Shall I have the happiness of having you as my companion?"—"To the city gate only," replied D'Artagnan; "after which I will tell you what I told the king: 'I am on duty.'"—"And you, dear Aramis," said Athos, smiling; "will you accompany me? La Fère is on the road to Vannes."—"Thank you, my dear friend," said Aramis; "but I have an appointment in Paris this evening, and I cannot leave without very serious interests suffering by my absence."

"In that case," said Athos, "I must say adieu, and take my leave of you. My dear M. de Baisemeaux, I have to thank you exceedingly for your good will, and particularly for the specimen you have given me of the Bastille fare;" and having embraced Aramis, and shaken hands with M. de Baisemeaux, and having received their wishes for an agreeable journey from them both, Athos set off with D'Artagnan.

While the *dénouement* of the scene of the Palais-Royal was taking place at the Bastille, let us relate what was going on at the lodgings of Athos and of Bragelonne. Grimaud, as we have seen, had accompanied his master to Paris; and, as we have said, he was present when Athos went out. He had seen D'Artagnan gnaw the corners of his moustache; he had seen his master get into the carriage; he had narrowly examined both their countenances, and he had known them both for a sufficiently long period to read and understand, through the mask of their impassiveness, that serious events were taking place. As soon as Athos had gone, he began to reflect; then he remembered the strange manner in which Athos had taken leave of him, the embarrassment—imperceptible to any one but himself—of his master,—that man of clear ideas and straightforward will. He knew that Athos had taken nothing with him but the clothes he had on him at the time; and yet he thought he saw that Athos had not left for an hour merely, or even for a day: a long absence was signified by the manner in which he pronounced the word "Adieu." All these circumstances recurred to his mind, with all his feelings of deep affection for Athos, with that horror of emptiness and solitude which invariably besets the minds of those who love; and all these, combined, rendered poor Grimaud very melancholy and particularly very apprehensive. Without being able to account to himself for what he did after his master's departure, he wandered

about the apartment, seeking as it were for some traces of him, like a faithful dog, who is not exactly uneasy about his absent master, but at least is restless. Only, as to the instinct of the animal Grimaud joined the reason of a man, he had at the same time restlessness and anxiety. Not having found any indication which could serve as a guide, and having neither seen nor discovered anything which could satisfy his doubts, Grimaud began to imagine what could have happened. Now, the imagination is the resource, or rather the punishment, of good and affectionate hearts. In fact, never does a good heart represent its absent friend to itself as being happy or cheerful. Never does the pigeon who travels inspire anything but terror to the pigeon who remains at home.

Grimaud soon passed from anxiety to terror; he carefully went over, in his own mind, everything that had taken place,—D'Artagnan's letter to Athos, the letter which had seemed to distress Athos so much; then Raoul's coming to Athos, upon which Athos had asked for his orders and his court dress; then his interview with the king, at the end of which Athos had returned home so gloomy; then the explanation between the father and the son, at the termination of which Athos had embraced Raoul with such sadness of expression, while Raoul himself went away sorrowfully; and finally, D'Artagnan's arrival, biting his moustache, and his leaving again in the carriage, accompanied by the Comte de la Fère. All this composed a drama in five acts, very plain, especially so to an analyst as skilful as Grimaud.

In the first place Grimaud resorted to grand measures: he searched in his master's coat for M. d'Artagnan's letter; he found the letter still there, and this is what it contained:

"My dear Friend,—Raoul has been to ask me for some particulars about the conduct of Mademoiselle de la Vallière during our young friend's residence in London. I am a poor captain of musketeers, whose ears are battered every day by the scandal of the barracks and the bedchamber. If I had told Raoul all I believe I know, the poor fellow would have died from it; but I am in the king's service, and cannot speak of the king's affairs. If your heart tells you to do it, set off at once; the matter concerns you more than myself, and almost as much as Raoul."

Grimaud tore, not a handful, but a finger-and-thumbful of

hair out of his head; he would have torn out more if his hair had been more abundant. "Yes," he said, "that is the key of the whole enigma. The young girl has been playing her pranks. What people say about her and the king is true, then. Our young master has been deceived; he ought to know it. Monsieur the Count has been to see the king, and has given him a piece of his mind; and then the king sent M. d'Artagnan to arrange the affair. Ah, my God!" continued Grimaud, "Monsieur the Count, I now remember, returned without his sword." This discovery made the perspiration break out all over poor Grimaud's face. He did not waste any more time in useless conjecture, but clapped his hat on his head and started for Raoul's lodgings.

Raoul, after Louise had left him, had mastered his grief if not his affection; and compelled to look forward on that perilous road on which madness and rebellion were hurrying him, he had seen, from the very first glance, his father exposed to the royal obstinacy, since Athos had immediately exposed himself to that obstinacy. In this moment, when sympathy gave him insight, the unhappy young man recalled the mysterious signs which Athos had made, and the unexpected visit of D'Artagnan. The probable result of the conflict between a sovereign and a subject revealed itself to his terrified vision. As D'Artagnan was on duty, that is, fixed to his post, he certainly had not come to pay Athos a visit merely for the pleasure of seeing him. He must have come to say something to him. This something, in a crisis so serious, was either a misfortune or a danger. Raoul shuddered at his selfishness in having forgotten his father for his love,—in having occupied himself with dreams or the fascinations of despair at a time when it was perhaps necessary to repel an imminent attack directed against Athos. The idea nearly drove him wild; he buckled on his sword and ran towards his father's lodgings. On his way thither he encountered Grimaud, who having set off from the opposite direction was running with equal eagerness in search of the truth. The two men embraced each other warmly; they were both at the same point of the parabola described by their imagination. "Grimaud!" exclaimed Raoul.—"M. Raoul!" cried Grimaud.

"Is the count well?"—"Have you seen him?"—"No; where is he?"—"I am trying to find out."—"And M. d'Artagnan?"—"Went out with him."—"When?"—"Ten minutes after you had left."

"In what way did they go out?"—"In a carriage."—"Where

did they go? "—"I have no idea at all."—"Did my father take any money with him?"—"No."—"Or his sword?"—"No."

"Grimaud!"—"M. Raoul!"—"I have an idea that M. d'Artagnan came to—"—"Arrest Monsieur the Count, do you not think, Monsieur?"—"Yes, Grimaud."—"I could have sworn it."

"What road did they take?"—"The way leading towards the quays."—"To the Bastille, then?"—"Ah, my God! yes."—"Quick, quick! let us run."—"Yes, let us run."—"But whither?" said Raoul, overwhelmed.

"We will go to M. d'Artagnan's first; we may perhaps learn something there."—"No; if he has kept it from me at my father's, he will do the same everywhere. Let us go to— Oh, good heavens! why, I must be mad to-day, Grimaud."—"Why so?"—"I have forgotten M. du Vallon—"—"M. Porthos?"—"Who is waiting for and expecting me still! Alas! I have told you correctly, I am mad!"

"Where is he, then?"—"At the Minimes of Vincennes."—"Thank goodness, that is in the direction of the Bastille. I will run and saddle the horses and we will go at once," said Grimaud.—"Do, my friend, do!"

CHAPTER CCV

IN WHICH PORTHOS IS CONVINCED WITHOUT HAVING UNDERSTOOD ANYTHING

THE worthy Porthos, faithful to all the laws of ancient chivalry, had determined to wait for M. de Saint-Aignan until sunset; and as De Saint-Aignan did not come, as Raoul had forgotten to communicate with his second, and as he found that waiting so long was very wearisome, Porthos had desired one of the gate-keepers to fetch him a few bottles of good wine and a good joint of meat,—so that he at least might have the diversion of enjoying from time to time a glass of wine and a mouthful of something to eat. He had just finished when Raoul arrived escorted by Grimaud, both of them riding at full speed. When Porthos saw the two cavaliers riding at such a pace along the road, he did not for a moment doubt but that they were the men he was expecting; and he rose from the grass upon which he had been indolently reclining, and began to stretch his legs and arms, saying, "See what it is to have good habits! The

Digitized by Google

fellow has come, after all. If I had gone away, he would have found no one here, and would have taken an advantage from that." He then threw himself into a martial attitude and drew himself up to the full height of his gigantic stature. But instead of De Saint-Aignan, he saw only Raoul, who with the most despairing gestures accosted him by crying out, "Pray forgive me, my dear friend! I am most wretched."

"Raoul!" cried Porthos, surprised.—"You have been angry with me?" said Raoul, embracing Porthos.—"I? What for?"—"For having forgotten you. But, you see, I have lost my head."—"Ah, bah!"

"If you only knew, my friend!"—"You have killed him?"—"Whom?"—"De Saint-Aignan."—"Alas! we are far from De Saint-Aignan."—"What is the matter, then?"—"The matter is that M. le Comte de la Fère has been arrested."

Porthos gave a start that would have thrown down a wall. "Arrested!" he cried out; "by whom?"—"By D Artagnan."—"It is impossible," said Porthos.—"It is nevertheless true," replied Raoul.

Porthos turned towards Grimaud, as if he needed a second confirmation of the intelligence. Grimaud nodded his head. "And where have they taken him?"—"Probably to the Bastille."—"What makes you think that?"—"As we came along we questioned some persons who saw the carriage pass, and others who saw it enter the Bastille."

"Oh! oh!" muttered Porthos; and he moved forward two steps.—"What do you intend to do?" inquired Raoul.—"I? Nothing; only, I will not have Athos remain at the Bastille."—"Do you know," said Raoul, advancing nearer to Porthos, "that the arrest was made by order of the king?"

Porthos looked at the young man as if to say, "What does that matter to me?" This dumb language seemed so eloquent of meaning to Raoul that he did not ask another question. He mounted his horse again; and Porthos, assisted by Grimaud, did the same. "Let us arrange our plan of action," said Raoul.—"Yes," returned Porthos; "that is the best thing we can do." Raoul sighed deeply, and then paused suddenly. "What is the matter?" asked Porthos; "are you faint?"—"No; powerless. Can we three pretend to go and take the Bastille?"—"Well, if D'Artagnan were only here," replied Porthos, "I don't know about that."

Raoul was struck with admiration at the sight of that confidence, heroic in its simplicity. These were the celebrated men

who by three or four attacked armies and assaulted castles, who had terrified death itself, and who survived the wrecks of an age, and were still stronger than the most robust among the young. "Monsieur," said he to Porthos, "you have just given me an idea; we absolutely must see M. d'Artagnan."—"Undoubtedly."—"He ought by this time to have returned home, after having taken my father to the Bastille. Let us go to his house."—"First inquire at the Bastille," said Grimaud, who was in the habit of speaking little, but to the purpose.

Accordingly they hastened towards the fortress, when one of those chances which Heaven bestows on men of strong will caused Grimaud suddenly to perceive the carriage which was entering by the great gate of the drawbridge. This was at the moment when D'Artagnan was, as we have seen, returning from his visit to the king. In vain Raoul urged on his horse to overtake the carriage and see whom it contained. The horses had already gained the other side of the great gate, which again closed, while one of the sentries struck the nose of Raoul's horse with his musket. Raoul turned about, only too happy to find that he had ascertained something respecting the carriage which had contained his father. "We have him," said Grimaud.

"If we wait a little, it is certain that he will leave; don't you think so, my friend?"—"Unless, indeed, D'Artagnan also be a prisoner," replied Porthos, "in which case everything is lost." Raoul returned no answer, for any hypothesis was admissible. He instructed Grimaud to lead the horses to the little Rue Jean-Beausire, so as to give rise to less suspicion, and himself with his piercing gaze watched for the exit either of D'Artagnan or the carriage. It was a fortunate plan; for twenty minutes had not elapsed before the gate reopened and the carriage reappeared. A dazzling of the eyes prevented Raoul from distinguishing what figures occupied the interior. Grimaud averred that he had seen two persons, and that one of them was his master. Porthos kept looking at Raoul and Grimaud by turns, in the hope of understanding their idea.

"It is clear," said Grimaud, "that if the count is in the carriage, either he is set at liberty or they are taking him to another prison."—"We shall soon see that by the road he takes," answered Porthos.—"If he is set at liberty," said Grimaud, "they will conduct him home."—"True," rejoined Porthos.—"The carriage does not take that way," cried Raoul; and indeed the horses were just disappearing down the Faubourg St. Antoine.

Digitized by Google

"Let us hasten," said Porthos; "we will attack the carriage on the road, and tell Athos to flee."—"Rebellion," murmured Raoul.

Porthos darted a second glance at Raoul, quite worthy of the first. Raoul replied only by spurring the flanks of his steed. In a few moments the three cavaliers had overtaken the carriage, and followed it so closely that their horses' breath moistened the back of it. D'Artagnan, whose senses were ever on the alert, heard the trot of the horses at the moment when Raoul was telling Porthos to pass the chariot so as to see who was the person accompanying Athos. Porthos complied, but could not see anything, for the blinds were lowered. Rage and impatience were gaining mastery over Raoul. He had just noticed the mystery preserved by Athos's companion, and determined on proceeding to extremities. On his part D'Artagnan had clearly recognised Porthos, and Raoul also, from under the blinds, and had communicated to the count the result of his observation. They were desirous only of seeing whether Raoul and Porthos would push the affair to the uttermost. And this they speedily did. Raoul, presenting his pistol, threw himself on the leader, commanding the coachman to stop. Porthos seized the coachman and dragged him from his seat. Grimaud already had hold of the carriage door. Raoul threw open his arms, exclaiming, "Monsieur the Count! Monsieur the Count!"

"Ah! is it you, Raoul?" said Athos, intoxicated with joy.—"Not bad, indeed!" added D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter; and they both embraced the young man and Porthos, who had captured them.—"My brave Porthos, best of friends!" cried Athos, "it is still the same with you."—"He is still only twenty," said D'Artagnan. "Bravo, Porthos!"

"Confound it!" answered Porthos, slightly confused, "we thought that you were arrested."—"While," rejoined Athos, "I was, in fact, only taking a drive in M. d'Artagnan's carriage."

"But we followed you from the Bastille," returned Raoul, with a tone of suspicion and reproach.—"Where we had been to take supper with our good friend M. Baisemeaux. You recollect Baisemeaux, Porthos?"—"Very well, indeed."—"And there we saw Aramis."—"In the Bastille?"—"At supper."—"Ah!" said Porthos, again breathing freely.—"He gave us a thousand messages for you."—"Thanks."

"And where is Monsieur the Count going?" asked Grimaud, already recompensed by a smile from his master.—"We are going home to Blois."—"How is that,—at once?"—"Yes;

right forward."—"Without any luggage?"—"Oh! Raoul would have been instructed to forward me mine, or to bring it with him on his return, if he returns."

"If nothing detains him longer in Paris," said D'Artagnan, with a glance firm and cutting as steel, and as painful (for it reopened the poor young fellow's wounds), "he will do well to follow you, Athos."—"There is nothing to keep me any longer in Paris," said Raoul.—"Then we will go immediately," replied Athos.—"And M. d'Artagnan?"—"Oh! as for me, I was only accompanying Athos as far as the barrier, and I return with Porthos."—"Very good," said the latter.

"Come, my son," added the count, gently passing his arm round Raoul's neck to draw him into the carriage, and again embracing him. "Grimaud," continued the count, "you will return quietly to Paris with your horse and M. du Vallon's, for Raoul and I will mount here and give up the carriage to these two gentlemen to return to Paris in; and then, as soon as you arrive, you will take my clothes and letters, and forward the whole to me at home."

"But," observed Raoul, who was anxious to make the count converse, "when you return to Paris, there will not be a single thing there for you,—which will be very inconvenient."—"I think it will be a very long time, Raoul, ere I return to Paris. The last sojourn we have made there has not been of a nature to encourage me to repeat it."

Raoul hung his head, and said not a word more. Athos descended from the carriage, and mounted the horse which had brought Porthos, and which seemed no little pleased at the exchange. Then they embraced, clasped one another's hands, and interchanged a thousand pledges of eternal friendship. Porthos promised to spend a month with Athos at the first opportunity. D'Artagnan engaged to take advantage of his first leave of absence; and then, having embraced Raoul for the last time, "To you, my boy," said he, "I will write." Coming from D'Artagnan, who he knew wrote but very seldom, these words expressed everything. Raoul was moved even to tears. He tore himself away from the musketeer, and departed.

D'Artagnan rejoined Porthos in the carriage. "Well," said he, "my dear friend, what a day we have had!"—"Indeed, we have," answered Porthos.—"You must be quite worn out?"—"Not quite; however, I shall retire early to rest, so as to be ready to-morrow."—"And wherefore?"—"Why, to complete what I have begun."

Digitized by Google

"You make me shudder, my friend; you seem to me quite angry. What the devil have you begun which is not finished?" —"Listen! Raoul has not fought; it is necessary that I should fight." —"With whom? — with the king?" —"How!" exclaimed Porthos, astounded, "with the king?"—"Yes, I say, you great baby! with the king."—"I assure you it is with M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Look now, this is what I mean: you draw your sword against the king in fighting with this gentleman."—"Ah!" said Porthos, staring; "are you sure of it?"—"Indeed, I am." —"How shall we arrange it, then?"—"We must try and make a good supper, Porthos. The captain of the musketeers keeps a tolerable table. There you will see the handsome De Saint-Aignan, and will drink his health."—"I!" cried Porthos, horrified.—"What!" said D'Artagnan, "you refuse to drink the king's health?"

"But, body alive! I am not talking to you about the king at all; I am speaking of M. de Saint-Aignan."—"But since I repeat that it is the same thing—"—"Ah, well, well!" said Porthos, overcome.—"You understand, don't you?"—"No," answered Porthos; "but 'tis all the same."—"Yes, it is all the same," replied D'Artagnan; "let us go to supper, Porthos."

CHAPTER CCVI

M. DE BAISEMEAUX'S "SOCIETY"

THE reader has not forgotten that, on quitting the Bastille, D'Artagnan and the Comte de la Fère had left Aramis in close confabulation with Baisemeaux. When once these two guests had departed, Baisemeaux did not in the least perceive that the conversation suffered by their absence. He thought that wine after supper, and that of the Bastille in particular, was excellent; and that it was a stimulant quite sufficient to make an honest man talk. But he little knew his greatness, who was never more impenetrable than at dessert. His greatness, however, perfectly understood M. de Baisemeaux, when he reckoned on making the governor discourse by the means which the latter regarded as efficacious. The conversation, therefore, without flagging in appearance, flagged in reality; for Baisemeaux not only had it nearly all to himself, but further kept

speaking only of that singular event,—the incarceration of Athos, followed by so prompt an order to set him again at liberty. Nor, moreover, had Baisemeaux failed to observe that the order of arrest and that of liberation were both in the king's hand. But the king would not take the trouble to write such orders except under pressing circumstances. All this was very interesting, and, above all, very puzzling to Baisemeaux; but as, on the other hand, all this was very clear to Aramis, the latter did not attach to the occurrence the same importance as did the worthy governor. Besides, Aramis rarely put himself out of the way for anything, and he had not yet told M. de Baisemeaux for what reason he had now done so; and so, at the very climax of Baisemeaux's dissertation, Aramis suddenly interrupted him. "Tell me, my dear M. Baisemeaux," said he, "have you never any other diversions at the Bastille than those at which I have assisted during the two or three visits I have had the honour to pay you?"

This address was so unexpected that the governor, like a vane which suddenly receives an impulsion opposed to that of the wind, was quite dumfounded at it. "Diversions!" said he; "but I take them continually, Monseigneur."—"Oh, to be sure! And these diversions—"—"Are of every kind."—"Visits, no doubt?"—"No, not visits. Visits are not frequent at the Bastille."

"What! are visits rare, then?"—"Very rare."—"Even on the part of your society?"—"What do you mean by my 'society,'—the prisoners?"—"Oh, no! Your prisoners, indeed! I know well it is you who visit them, and not they you. By your society I mean, my dear M. Baisemeaux, the society of which you are a member."

Baisemeaux looked fixedly at Aramis, and then, as if the idea which had flashed across his mind were impossible, "Oh!" he said, "I have very little society at present. If I must own it to you, my dear M. d'Herblay, the fact is, to stay at the Bastille appears for the most part distressing and distasteful to persons of the gay world. As for the ladies, it is never without a dread, which costs me infinite trouble to allay, that they come to my quarters. And, indeed, how should they avoid trembling a little, poor things, when they see those gloomy dungeons, and reflect that they are inhabited by prisoners who—" In proportion as the eyes of Baisemeaux concentrated their gaze on the face of Aramis, the worthy governor's tongue faltered more and more, until finally it stopped altogether.

"No, you don't understand me, my dear M. Baisemeaux,—you don't understand me. I do not at all mean to speak of society in general, but of a particular society,—of the society, in a word, to which you are affiliated." Baisemeaux nearly dropped the glass of muscat which he was in the act of raising to his lips. "Affiliated!" cried he, "affiliated!"

"Yes, affiliated, undoubtedly," repeated Aramis, with the greatest self-possession. "Are you not a member of a secret society, my dear M. Baisemeaux?"—"Secret?"—"Secret or mysterious."—"Oh, M. d'Herblay!"—"See! you don't deny it."—"But, believe me—"—"I believe what I know."—"I swear to you."

"Listen to me, my dear M. Baisemeaux! I say 'yes,' you say 'no.' One of us two necessarily says what is true; and the other, it inevitably follows, what is false."—"Well, and then?"—"Well, we shall come to an understanding presently."—"Let us see," said Baisemeaux; "let us see,"—"Now drink your glass of muscat, dear M. Baisemeaux," said Aramis. "What the devil! you look quite scared."—"No, no, not the least in the world; no."—"Drink, then."

Baisemeaux drank, but he swallowed the wrong way. "Well," resumed Aramis, "if, I say, you are not a member of a society, secret or mysterious, whichever you like to call it,—the epithet is of no consequence,—if, I say, you are not a member of a society similar to that I wish to designate, well, then, you will not understand a word of what I am going to say, that is all."—"Oh! be sure beforehand that I shall not understand anything."—"Well, well!"—"Try now; let us see."

"That is what I am going to do. If, on the contrary, you are one of the members of this society, you will immediately answer me, 'yes' or 'no.'"—"Begin your questions, then," continued Baisemeaux, trembling.

"You will agree, dear M. de Baisemeaux," continued Aramis, with the same impassiveness, "that it is evident a man cannot be a member of a society, it is evident that he cannot enjoy the advantages it offers to the affiliated, without being himself bound to certain little services."—"In short," stammered Baisemeaux, "that would be intelligible if—"—"Well," resumed Aramis, "there is in the society of which I speak, and of which, as it seems, you are not a member—"—"Allow me," said Baisemeaux; "I should not like to say absolutely."

"There is an engagement entered into by all the governors and captains of fortresses affiliated to the order." Baisemeaux

grew pale. "Now the engagement," continued Aramis, firmly, "is of this nature." Baisemeaux rose, manifesting unspeakable emotion. "Go on, dear M. d'Herblay; go on!" said he. Aramis then spoke, or rather recited, the following sentence, in the same tone as if he had been reading it from a book: "The aforesaid captain or governor of a fortress shall allow to enter, when need shall arise, and on demand of the prisoner, a confessor affiliated to the order." He stopped. Baisemeaux was quite distressing to look at, being so wretchedly pale and trembling. "Is not that the text of the agreement?" quietly asked Aramis.

"Monseigneur!" began Baisemeaux.—"Ah, well, you begin to understand, I think."—"Monseigneur," cried Baisemeaux, "do not trifle so with my unhappy mind! I find myself nothing in your hands, if you have the malignant desire to draw from me the little secrets of my administration."—"Oh, by no means! Pray undeceive yourself, dear M. Baisemeaux; it is not the little secrets of your administration that I aim at, but those of your conscience."

"Well, then, my conscience be it, my dear M. d'Herblay! But have some consideration for the situation I am in, which is no ordinary one."—"It is no ordinary one, my dear Monsieur," continued the inflexible Aramis, "if you are a member of this society; but it is quite a natural one if, free from all engagements, you are answerable only to the king."—"Well, Monsieur, well! I obey only the king. Good God! whom else would you have a French gentleman obey?"

Aramis did not yield an inch; but with that silvery voice of his continued: "It is very pleasant for a French gentleman, for a prelate of France, to hear a man of your mark express himself so loyally, dear De Baisemeaux, and having heard you, to believe no more than you do."—"Have you doubted, Monsieur?"—"I? Oh, no!"—"And so you doubt no longer?"—"I have no longer any doubt that such a man as you, Monsieur," said Aramis, gravely, "does not faithfully serve the masters whom he voluntarily chose for himself."

"Masters!" cried Baisemeaux.—"Yes, masters, I said."—"M. d'Herblay, you are still jesting, are you not?"—"Oh, yes! I understand that it is a more difficult position to have several masters than one; but the embarrassment is owing to you, my dear Baisemeaux, and I am not the cause of it."

"Certainly not," returned the unfortunate governor, more embarrassed than ever; "but what are you doing? You are leaving the table?"—"Assuredly."—"Are you going?"—

"Yes, I am going."—"But you are behaving very strangely towards me, Monseigneur."

"I am behaving strangely,—in what respect?"—"Have you sworn, then, to put me to the torture?"—"No, I should be sorry to do so."—"Remain, then."—"I cannot."—"And why?"—"Because I have no longer anything to do here; and, indeed, I have duties to fulfil elsewhere."

"Duties so late as this?"—"Yes; understand me now, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. They told me at the place whence I came, 'The aforesaid governor or captain will allow to enter, as need shall arise, on the prisoner's demand, a confessor affiliated with the order.' I came; you do not know what I mean, and so I shall return to tell them that they are mistaken, and that they must send me elsewhere."—"What! you are—" cried Baisemeaux, looking at Aramis almost in terror.—"The confessor affiliated to the order," said Aramis, without changing his voice.

But, gentle as the words were, they had the same effect on the unhappy governor as a clap of thunder. Baisemeaux became livid, and it seemed to him as if Aramis's beaming eyes were two forks of flame, piercing to the very bottom of his soul. "The confessor!" murmured he; "you, Monseigneur, the confessor of the order!"—"Yes, I; but we have nothing to unravel together, seeing that you are not one of the affiliated."—"Monseigneur!"—"And I understand that, not being so, you refuse to comply with its commands."

"Monseigneur, I beseech you, condescend to hear me."—"And wherefore?"—"Monseigneur, I do not say that I have nothing to do with the society."—"Ah! ah!"—"I say not that I refuse to obey."—"Nevertheless, M. de Baisemeaux, what has passed wears very much the air of resistance."—"Oh, no, Monseigneur, no! I only wished to be certain."—"To be certain of what?" said Aramis, in a tone of supreme contempt.—"Of nothing at all, Monseigneur." Baisemeaux lowered his voice, and bending before the prelate said, "I am at all times and in all places at the disposal of my masters, but—"

"Very good. I like you better thus, Monsieur," said Aramis, as he resumed his seat, and put out his glass to Baisemeaux, whose hand trembled so that he could not fill it. "You were saying 'but'—" continued Aramis.—"But," replied the unhappy man, "having no notice, I was far from expecting."—"Does not the Gospel say, 'Watch, for the moment is known only of God'? Do not the rules of the order say, 'Watch; for that which I will, you ought always to will also'? And on

what pretext is it that you did not expect the confessor, M. de Baisemeaux?"—"Because, Monseigneur, there is at present in the Bastille no prisoner ill."

Aramis shrugged his shoulders. "What do you know about that?" said he.—"But nevertheless, it appears to me—"—"M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, turning round in his chair, "here is your servant, who wishes to speak with you;" and at this moment Baisemeaux's servant appeared at the threshold of the door.

"What is it?" asked Baisemeaux, sharply.—"Monsieur," said the man, "they are bringing you the doctor's return." Aramis looked at Baisemeaux with a calm and confident eye. "Well," said Baisemeaux, "let the messenger enter."

The messenger entered, saluted, and handed in the report. Baisemeaux ran his eye over it, and raising his head said, in surprise, "No. 2 Bertaudière is ill."—"How was it, then," said Aramis, carelessly, "that you told me everybody was well in your hotel, M. de Baisemeaux?" and he emptied his glass without removing his eyes from Baisemeaux.

The governor then made a sign to the messenger, and when he had quitted the room said, still trembling, "I think that there is in the article, 'on the prisoner's demand.'"—"Yes, it is so;" answered Aramis. "But see what it is they want with you now."

At that moment a sergeant put his head in at the door. "What do you want now?" cried Baisemeaux. "Can you not leave me in peace for ten minutes?"—"Monsieur," said the sergeant, "the sick man, No. 2 Bertaudière, has commissioned the turnkey to request you to send him a confessor."

Baisemeaux very nearly sank on the floor; but Aramis disdained to reassure him, just as he had disdained to terrify him. "What must I answer?" inquired Baisemeaux.—"Just what you please," replied Aramis, compressing his lips; "that is your business. *I* am not governor of the Bastille."—"Tell the prisoner," cried Baisemeaux, quickly,—"tell the prisoner that his request is granted." The sergeant left the room. "Oh, Monseigneur, Monseigneur," murmured Baisemeaux, "how could I have suspected?—how could I have foreseen this?"—"Who told you to suspect, and who asked you to foresee?" contemptuously answered Aramis. "The order suspects, the order knows, the order foresees,—is not that enough?"

"What do you command?" added Baisemeaux.—"I?—

nothing at all. I am nothing but a poor priest, a simple confessor. Have I your orders to go and see the sufferer? "—" Oh, Monseigneur, I do not order; I pray you to go."—" 'Tis well; then conduct me to him."

CHAPTER CCVII

THE PRISONER

SINCE Aramis's singular transformation into a confessor of the order, Baisemeaux was no longer the same man. Up to that period the place which Aramis had held in the worthy governor's estimation was that of a prelate whom he respected and a friend to whom he owed a debt of gratitude; but after that revelation which had upset all his ideas, he felt himself an inferior, and that Aramis was his master. He himself lighted a lantern, summoned a turnkey, and said, returning to Aramis, " I am at your orders, Monseigneur." Aramis merely nodded his head, as much as to say, " Very good; " and signed to him with his hand to lead the way. Baisemeaux advanced, and Aramis followed him.

It was a beautiful starry night; the steps of the three men resounded on the flags of the terraces, and the clinking of the keys hanging from the jailer's girdle made itself heard up to the stories of the towers, as if to remind the prisoners that liberty was out of their reach. It might have been said that the alteration effected in Baisemeaux had extended itself even to the prisoners. The turnkey, the same who on Aramis's first arrival had shown himself so inquisitive and curious, had now become not only silent, but even impassible. He held his head down, and seemed afraid to keep his ears open. In this wise they reached the basement of the Bertaudière, the first two stories of which were mounted silently and somewhat slowly; for Baisemeaux, though far from disobeying, was far from exhibiting any eagerness to obey. Finally, they arrived at the door. The jailer had the key ready, and opened the door. Baisemeaux showed a disposition to enter the prisoner's chamber; but Aramis, stopping him on the threshold, said, " The rules do not allow the governor to hear the prisoner's confession."

Baisemeaux bowed, and made way for Aramis, who took the lantern and entered, and then signed to them to close the

door behind him. For an instant he remained standing, listening to learn whether Baisemeaux and the turnkey had retired; but as soon as he was assured by the dying sound of their footsteps that they had left the tower, he put the lantern on the table and gazed around. On a bed of green serge, similar in all respects to the other beds in the Bastille, save that it was newer, under ample curtains half drawn, reposed a young man to whom we have once before introduced Aramis. According to custom, the prisoner was without a light. At the hour of curfew he was bound to extinguish his lamp; it may be seen how much he was favoured in being allowed to keep it burning until that hour. Near the bed a large leathern arm-chair, with twisted legs, held his clothes. A little table—without pens, books, paper, or ink—stood deserted near the window; while several plates, still unemptied, showed that the prisoner had scarcely touched his recent repast. Aramis saw that the young man was stretched upon his bed, his face half concealed by his arms. The arrival of a visitor did not cause any change of position; either he was waiting in expectation or he was asleep. Aramis lighted the candle from the lantern, pushed back the arm-chair, and approached the bed with an appearance of mingled interest and respect.

The young man raised his head. "What is it?" said he.—"Have you not desired a confessor?" replied Aramis.—"Yes."—"Because you are ill?"—"Yes."—"Very ill?" The young man gave Aramis a piercing glance, and answered, "I thank you." After a moment's silence, "I have seen you before," he continued.

Aramis bowed. Doubtless the scrutiny which the prisoner had just made of the cold, crafty, and imperious character stamped upon the features of the Bishop of Vannes was little reassuring to one in his situation, for he added, "I am better."—"And then?" said Aramis.—"Why, then, being better, I have no longer the same need of a confessor, I think."

"Not even of the haircloth, of which the note you found in your bread informed you?" The young man started; but before he had either assented or denied, Aramis continued, "Not even of the ecclesiastic from whom you were to hear an important revelation?"—"If it be so," said the young man, sinking again on his pillow, "it is different; I listen."

Aramis then looked at him more closely, and was struck with the easy majesty of his mien,—one which can never be acquired unless Heaven has implanted it in the blood or in the heart.

"Sit down, Monsieur!" said the prisoner. Aramis bowed and obeyed.

"How does the Bastille agree with you?" asked the bishop. —"Very well."—"You do not suffer?"—"No."—"You have nothing to regret?"—"Nothing."—"Not even your liberty?" —"What do you call liberty, Monsieur?" asked the prisoner, with the tone of a man who is preparing for a struggle.—"I call liberty the flowers, the air, light, the stars, the happiness of going whithersoever the nervous limbs of twenty years of age may wish to carry you."

The young man smiled,—whether in resignation or contempt, it would have been difficult to tell. "Look!" said he; "I have in that Japanese vase two roses gathered yesterday evening in the bud from the governor's garden. This morning they have blown and spread their vermilion chalices beneath my gaze; with every opening petal they unfold the treasures of their perfume, filling my chamber with fragrance. Look now on these two roses; even among roses these are beautiful, and the rose is the most beautiful of flowers. Why, then, do you bid me desire other flowers when I possess the loveliest of all?"

Aramis gazed at the young man in surprise. "If *flowers* constitute liberty," sadly resumed the captive, "I am free, for I possess them."—"But the air!" cried Aramis,—"air so necessary to life!"—"Well, Monsieur," returned the prisoner, "draw near to the window; it is open. Between heaven and earth the wind whirls its storms of hail and lightning, wafts its warm mists, or breathes in gentle breezes. It caresses my face. When mounted on the back of this arm-chair, with my arms around the bars of the window to sustain myself, I fancy I am swimming in the wide expanse."

The countenance of Aramis darkened while the young man was speaking. "Light!" continued the prisoner,—"I have what is better than light! I have the sun,—a friend who comes to visit me every day without the permission of the governor or the jailer's company. He comes in at the window, and traces in my room a quadrilateral which starts from the window and reaches to the hangings of my bed. This luminous figure increases from ten o'clock till mid-day, and decreases from one till three slowly, as if, having hastened to come, it sorrowed at leaving me. When its last ray disappears, I have enjoyed its presence for four hours. Is not that sufficient? I have been told that there are unhappy beings who dig in quarries, and labourers who toil in mines, who never behold the sun at all."

Digitized by Google

Aramis wiped the drops from his brow. "As to the stars which are so delightful to view," continued the young man, "they all resemble one another save in size and brilliancy. I am a favoured mortal; for if you had not lighted that candle, you would have been able to see the beautiful star which I was gazing at from my couch before your arrival, and whose rays were playing over my eyes."

Aramis lowered his head; he felt himself overwhelmed by the bitter flow of that sinister philosophy which is the religion of the captive. "So much, then, for the flowers, the air, the daylight, and the stars," tranquilly continued the young man; "there remains freedom of movement. Do I not walk all day in the governor's garden if it is fine; here, if it rains; in the fresh air, if it is warm; in the warm, thanks to my fireplace, if it be cold? Ah, Monsieur, do you fancy," continued the prisoner, not without bitterness, "that men have not done everything for me that a man can hope for or desire?"

"Men!" said Aramis, raising his head; "be it so! But it seems to me you forget Heaven."—"Indeed, I have forgotten Heaven," murmured the prisoner, without emotion; "but why do you mention it? Of what use is it to talk to a prisoner of Heaven?" Aramis looked steadily at this singular youth, who possessed the resignation of a martyr with the smile of an atheist. "Is not God in everything?" he murmured in a reproachful tone.—"Say rather, at the end of everything," answered the prisoner, firmly.

"Be it so," said Aramis; "but let us return to our starting-point."—"I desire nothing better," returned the young man. —"I am your confessor."—"Yes."—"Well, then, you ought, as a penitent, to tell me the truth."—"All that I wish is to tell it to you."

"Every prisoner has committed some crime for which he has been imprisoned. What crime, then, have you committed?" —"You asked me the same question the first time you saw me," returned the prisoner.—"And then, as now, you evaded giving me an answer."—"And what reason have you for thinking that I shall now reply to you?"—"Because this time I am your confessor."

"Then, if you wish me to tell what crime I have committed, explain to me in what a crime consists; for as my conscience does not accuse me, I aver that I am not a criminal."—"We are often criminals in the sight of the great of the earth, not alone for having ourselves committed crimes, but because we

Digitized by Google

know that crimes have been committed." The prisoner manifested the deepest attention. "Yes, I understand you," he said, after a pause; "yes, you are right, Monsieur. It is very possible that in that light I am a criminal in the eyes of the great."—"Ah! then you know something," said Aramis, who thought he had pierced not merely through a defect in the harness, but through the joints of it.

"No, I am not aware of anything," replied the young man; "but sometimes I think, and I say to myself in those moments—"—"What do you say to yourself?"—"That if I were to think any further, I should either go mad or I should divine a great deal."—"And then—and then—" said Aramis, impatiently.—"Then I leave off."

"You leave off?"—"Yes; my head becomes confused, and my ideas melancholy. I feel ennui overtaking me; I wish—" —"What?"—"I don't know; but I do not like to give myself up to longing for things which I do not possess, when I am so happy with what I have."

"You are afraid of death?" said Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.—"Yes," said the young man, smiling. Aramis felt the chill of that smile, and shuddered. "Oh, as you fear death, you know more than you admit!" he cried.—"And you," returned the prisoner, "who bade me to ask to see you,—you, who when I did ask for you came here promising a world of confidence,—how is it that, nevertheless, it is you who are silent, and 'tis I who speak? Since, then, we both wear masks, either let us both retain them or put them aside together."

Aramis felt the force and justice of the remark, saying to himself, "This is no ordinary man." "Are you ambitious?" said he suddenly to the prisoner, aloud, without preparing him for the alteration.—"What do you mean by ambition?" replied the youth.—"It is," replied Aramis, "a feeling which prompts a man to desire more than he has."

"I said that I was contented, Monsieur; but perhaps I deceive myself. I am ignorant of the nature of ambition; but it is not impossible I may have some. Come, open my mind; I ask nothing better."—"An ambitious man," said Aramis, "is one who covets what is beyond his station."—"I covet nothing beyond my station," said the young man, with an assurance of manner which yet again made the Bishop of Vannes tremble.

Aramis was silent. But to look at the kindling eye, the knitted brow, and the reflective attitude of the captive, it was

evident that he expected something more than silence. That silence Aramis now broke. "You lied the first time I saw you," said he.—"Lied!" cried the young man, starting up on his couch, with such a tone in his voice and such lightning in his eyes that Aramis recoiled in spite of himself.—"I should say," returned Aramis, bowing, "you concealed from me what you knew of your infancy."—"A man's secrets are his own, Monsieur," retorted the prisoner, "and not at the mercy of the first chance-comer."

"True," said Aramis, bowing still lower than before, "'tis true; pardon me, but to-day do I still occupy the place of chance-comer? I beseech you to reply, Monseigneur." This title slightly disturbed the prisoner; but nevertheless he did not appear astonished that it was given to him. "I do not know you, Monsieur," said he.—"Oh, if I but dared, I would take your hand and would kiss it!"

The young man seemed as if he were going to give Aramis his hand; but the light which beamed in his eyes faded away, and he coldly and distrustfully withdrew his hand. "Kiss the hand of a prisoner!" he said, shaking his head; "to what purpose?"—"Why did you tell me," said Aramis, "that you were happy here? Why, that you aspired to nothing? Why, in a word, by thus speaking, do you prevent me from being frank in my turn?"

The same light shone a third time in the young man's eyes, but died as before, without leading to anything. "You distrust me," said Aramis.—"And why say you so, Monsieur?"—"Oh, for a very simple reason! If you know what you ought to know, you ought to mistrust everybody."—"Then be not astonished that I am mistrustful, since you suspect me of knowing what I know not."

Aramis was struck with admiration at this energetic resistance. "Oh, Monseigneur, you drive me to despair!" said he, striking the arm-chair with his fist.—"And on my part I do not comprehend you, Monsieur."—"Well, then, try to understand me." The prisoner looked fixedly at Aramis. "Sometimes it seems to me," said the latter, "that I have before me the man whom I seek, and then—"—"And then your man disappears,—is it not so?" said the prisoner, smiling. "So much the better."

Aramis rose. "Certainly," said he; "I have nothing further to say to a man who mistrusts me as you do."—"And I, Monsieur," said the prisoner, in the same tone, "have nothing to say to a man who will not understand that a prisoner ought

to be mistrustful of everybody."—"Even of his old friends?" said Aramis. "Oh, Monseigneur, you are too cautious!"

"Of my old friends?—you one of my old friends,—you?"—"Do you no longer remember," said Aramis, "that you once saw in the village where your early years were spent—"

"Do you know the name of the village?" asked the prisoner.—"Noisy-le-Sec, Monseigneur," answered Aramis, firmly.—"Go on!" said the young man, without expression of assent or denial on his countenance.

"Stay, Monseigneur!" said Aramis; "if you are positively resolved to carry on this game, let us break off. I am here to tell you many things, 'tis true; but you must allow me to see that, on your side, you have a desire to know them. Before revealing the important matters I conceal, be assured that I am in need of some encouragement, if not candour; a little sympathy, if not confidence. But you keep yourself entrenched in a pretended ignorance which paralyses me. Oh, not for the reason you think; for ignorant as you may be, or indifferent as you feign to be, you are none the less what you are, Monseigneur, and there is nothing—nothing, mark me!—which can cause you not to be so."

"I promise you," replied the prisoner, "to hear you without impatience. Only, it appears to me that I have a right to repeat the question I have already asked,—'Who are you?'"—"Do you remember, fifteen or eighteen years ago, seeing at Noisy-le-Sec a cavalier, accompanied by a lady plainly dressed in black silk, with flame-coloured ribbons in her hair?"

"Yes," said the young man; "I once asked the name of this cavalier, and was told that he called himself the Abbé d'Herblay. I was astonished that the abbé had so warlike an air, and was told that there was nothing singular in that, seeing that he was one of Louis XIII.'s musketeers."—"Well," said Aramis, "that musketeer of other times, that abbé afterwards, then Bishop of Vannes, is to-day your confessor."—"I know it; I recognised you."

"Then, Monseigneur, if you know that, I must add a fact of which you are ignorant,—that if the king were to know this evening of the presence here of this musketeer, this abbé, this bishop, this confessor, he who has risked everything to visit you would to-morrow see glitter the executioner's axe at the bottom of a dungeon more gloomy and more obscure than yours."

While hearing these words, delivered with emphasis, the young man had raised himself on his couch and gazed more and more

eagerly at Aramis. The result of this scrutiny was that he appeared to derive some confidence from it. "Yes," he murmured, "I remember perfectly. The woman of whom you speak came once with you, and twice afterwards with the woman—" He hesitated.—"With another woman who came to see you every month,—is it not so, Monseigneur?"—"Yes."—"Do you know who this lady was?" The light seemed ready to flash from the prisoner's eyes. "I am aware that she was one of the ladies of the court," he said.

"You remember that lady well, do you not?"—"Oh, my recollection can hardly be very confused on this head!" said the young prisoner. "I saw that lady once with a gentleman about forty-five years old. I saw her once with you, and with the lady dressed in black with flame-coloured ribbons. I have seen her twice since with the same person. These four persons, with my tutor and old Perronnette, my jailer and the governor of the prison, are the only persons with whom I have ever spoken, and, indeed, almost the only persons I have ever seen."

"Then, you were in prison?"—"If I am a prisoner here, there I was comparatively free, although in a very narrow sense. A house which I never quitted, a garden surrounded with walls I could not clear,—these constituted my residence; but you know it, as you have been there. In a word, being accustomed to live within these bounds, I never cared to leave them. And so you will understand, Monsieur, that not having seen anything of the world, I can desire nothing; and therefore, if you relate anything, you will be obliged to explain everything to me."—"And I will do so," said Aramis, bowing; "for it is my duty, Monseigneur."

"Well, then, begin by telling me who was my tutor."—"A worthy and above all an honourable gentleman, Monseigneur; fit guide both for body and soul. Had you ever any reason to complain of him?"—"Oh, no; quite the contrary. But this gentleman of yours often used to tell me that my father and mother were dead. Did he deceive me, or did he speak the truth?"—"He was compelled to comply with the orders given him."

"Then he lied?"—"In one respect. Your father is dead."—"And my mother?"—"She is dead for you."—"But then she lives for others, does she not?"—"Yes."

"And I—and I, then [the young man looked sharply at Aramis], am compelled to live in the obscurity of a prison?"—"Alas! I fear so."—"And that because my presence in the

Digitized by Google

world would lead to the revelation of a great secret?"—"Certainly, a very great secret."

"My enemy must indeed be powerful, to be able to shut up in the Bastille a child such as I then was."—"He is."—"More powerful than my mother, then?"—"And why do you ask that?"—"Because my mother would have taken my part." Aramis hesitated. "Yes, Monseigneur; more powerful than your mother."

"Seeing, then, that my nurse and preceptor were carried off, and that I also was separated from them,—either they were, or I am, very dangerous to my enemy?"—"Yes; a peril from which he freed himself by causing the nurse and preceptor to disappear," answered Aramis, quietly.—"Disappear!" cried the prisoner; "but how did they disappear?"—"In the surest possible way," answered Aramis: "they are dead." The young man turned visibly pale, and passed his hand tremblingly over his face. "From poison?" he asked.—"From poison."

The prisoner reflected a moment. "My enemy must indeed have been very cruel, or hard beset by necessity, to assassinate those two innocent persons, my sole support; for that worthy gentleman and that poor woman had never harmed a living being."—"In your family, Monseigneur, necessity is stern. And so it is necessity which compels me, to my great regret, to tell you that this gentleman and the unhappy lady were assassinated."

"Oh, you tell me nothing I am not aware of!" said the prisoner, knitting his brows.—"How?"—"I suspected it."—"Why?"—"I will tell you."

At this moment the young man, supporting himself on his elbows, drew close to Aramis's face, with such an expression of dignity, of self-command, and of defiance even, that the bishop felt the electricity of enthusiasm strike in devouring flashes from that seared heart of his into his brain of adamant.

"Speak, Monseigneur! I have already told you that by conversing with you I endanger my life. Little value as it has, I implore you to accept it as the ransom of your own."—"Well," resumed the young man, "this is why I suspected that they had killed my nurse and my preceptor—"—"Whom you used to call your father."—"Yes! whom I called my father, but whose son I well knew I was not."

"Who caused you to suppose so?"—"Just as you, Monsieur, are too respectful for a friend, he was also too respectful for

Digitized by Google

a father."—"I, however," said Aramis, "have no intention to disguise myself."

The young man nodded assent, and continued: "Undoubtedly, I was not destined to perpetual seclusion," said the prisoner; "and that which makes me believe so now, above all, is the care that was taken to render me as accomplished a cavalier as possible. The gentleman attached to my person taught me everything he knew himself,—mathematics, a little geometry, astronomy, fencing, and riding. Every morning I went through military exercises, and practised on horseback. Well, one morning during summer, it being very hot, I went to sleep in the hall. Nothing up to that period, except the respect paid me by my tutor, had enlightened me, or even roused my suspicions. I lived as children, as birds, as plants, as the air and the sun do. I had just turned my fifteenth year—"—"This, then, was eight years ago? "—"Yes, nearly; but I have ceased to reckon time."

"Excuse me; but what did your tutor tell you, to encourage you to work? "—"He used to say that a man was bound to make for himself in the world that fortune which Heaven had refused him at his birth. He added, that, being a poor obscure orphan, I had no one but myself to look to; and that nobody either did or ever would take any interest in me. I was, then, in the hall I have spoken of, asleep from fatigue in fencing. My tutor was in his room on the first floor, just over me. Suddenly I heard him exclaim; and then he called, 'Perronnette! Perronnette!' It was my nurse whom he called."—"Yes! I know it," said Aramis. "Continue, Monseigneur!"

"Very likely she was in the garden; for my tutor came hastily downstairs. I rose, anxious at seeing him anxious. He opened the garden door, still crying out, 'Perronnette! Perronnette!' The windows of the hall looked into the court. The shutters were closed; but through a chink in them I saw my tutor draw near a large well, which was almost directly under the windows of his study. He stooped over the brim, looked into the well, again cried out, and made wild and affrighted gestures. Where I was, I could not only see, but hear; and see and hear I did."

"Go on, I pray you!" said Aramis.—"Dame Perronnette came running up, hearing the governor's cries. He went to meet her, took her by the arm, and drew her quickly towards the edge; after which, as they both bent over it together, 'Look, look!' cried he; 'what a misfortune!' 'Calm yourself, calm

Google

yourself,' said Perronnette; 'what is the matter?' 'The letter!' he exclaimed; 'do you see that letter?' pointing to the bottom of the well. 'What letter?' she cried. 'The letter you see down there,—the last letter from the queen.' At this word I trembled. My tutor—he who passed for my father, he who was continually recommending to me modesty and humility—in correspondence with the queen! 'The queen's last letter!' cried Perronnette, without showing other astonishment than at seeing this letter at the bottom of the well; 'but how came it there?' 'A chance, Dame Perronnette,—a singular chance. I was entering my room; and on opening the door, the window too being open, a puff of air came suddenly and carried off this paper,—this letter from the queen; I darted after it, and gained the window just in time to see it flutter a moment in the breeze and disappear down the well.' 'Well,' said Dame Perronnette; 'and if the letter has fallen into the well, 'tis all the same as if it were burned; and as the queen burns all her letters every time she comes—' 'Every time she comes!' So this lady who came every month was the queen," said the prisoner.—"Yes," nodded Aramis.

"'Doubtless, doubtless,' continued the old gentleman; 'but this letter contained instructions,—how can I follow them?' 'Write immediately to her; give her a plain account of the accident, and the queen will no doubt write you another letter in place of this.' 'Oh! the queen would never believe the story,' said the good gentleman, shaking his head; 'she will imagine that I want to keep this letter instead of giving it up like the rest, so as to have a hold over her. She is so distrustful, and M. de Mazarin so— This devil of an Italian is capable of having us poisoned at the first breath of suspicion.'" Aramis almost imperceptibly smiled.

"'You know, Dame Perronnette, they are both so suspicious in all that concerns Philippe.' 'Philippe' was the name they gave me," said the prisoner. 'Well, 'tis no use hesitating,' said Dame Perronnette; 'somebody must go down the well.' 'Of course; so that the person who goes down may read the paper as he is coming up.' 'But let us choose some villager who cannot read, and then you will be at ease.' 'Granted; but will not any one who descends guess that a paper must be important for which we risk a man's life? However, you have given me an idea, Dame Perronnette; somebody shall go down the well, but that somebody shall be myself.' But at this notion Dame Perronnette lamented and cried in such a manner,

Digitized by Google

and so implored the old nobleman, with tears in her eyes, that he promised her to obtain a ladder long enough to reach down, while she went in search of some stout-hearted youth, whom she was to persuade that a jewel had fallen into the well, and that this jewel was wrapped in a paper. 'And as paper,' remarked my preceptor, 'naturally unfolds in water, the young man would not be surprised at finding nothing, after all, but the letter wide open.' 'But perhaps the writing will be already effaced by that time,' said Dame Perronnette. 'No consequence, provided we secure the letter. On returning it to the queen, she will see at once that we have not betrayed her; and consequently, as we shall not rouse the distrust of Mazarin, we shall have nothing to fear from him.' Having come to this resolution, they parted. I pushed back the shutter, and seeing that my tutor was about to re-enter, threw myself on my couch, in a confusion of brain caused by all I had just heard. My tutor opened the door a few moments after, and thinking I was asleep, gently closed it again. As soon as ever it was shut, I rose, and listening heard the sound of retiring footsteps. Then I returned to the shutter, and saw my tutor and Dame Perronnette go out together. I was alone in the house. They had hardly closed the gate before I sprang from the window and ran to the well. Then, just as my tutor had leaned over, so leaned I. Something white and luminous glistened in the green and quivering ripples of the water. The brilliant disk fascinated and allured me; my eyes became fixed, and I could hardly breathe. The well seemed to draw me in with its large mouth and icy breath; and I thought I read, at the bottom of the water, characters of fire traced upon the letter the queen had touched. Then, scarcely knowing what I was about, and urged on by one of those instinctive impulses which drive men upon their destruction, I made fast one end of the rope to the bottom of the well-curb; I left the bucket hanging about three feet under water,—at the same time taking infinite pains not to disturb that coveted letter, which was beginning to change its white tint for a greenish hue,—proof enough that it was sinking,—and then, with a piece of wet canvas protecting my hands, slid down into the abyss. When I saw myself hanging over the dark pool, when I saw the sky lessening above my head, a cold shudder came over me, I was seized with giddiness, and the hair rose on my head; but my strong will mastered all. I gained the water, and at once plunged into it, holding on by one hand, while I immersed the other and seized the

precious paper, which, alas! came in two in my grasp. I concealed the two fragments in my coat, and helping myself with my feet against the side of the pit, and clinging on with my hands, agile and vigorous as I was, and above all pressed for time, I regained the brink, drenching it as I touched it with the water that streamed from all the lower part of my body. Once out of the well with my prize I rushed into the sunlight, and took refuge in a kind of shrubbery at the bottom of the garden. As I entered my hiding-place, the bell which resounded when the great gate was opened, rang. It was my tutor returning. I had but just time. I calculated that it would take ten minutes before he would gain my place of concealment, even if, guessing where I was, he came straight to it; and twenty if he were obliged to look for me. But this was time enough to allow me to read the cherished letter, whose fragments I hastened to unite again. The writing was already fading, but I managed to decipher it all."

"And what read you there, Monseigneur?" asked Aramis, deeply interested.—"Quite enough, Monsieur, to see that my tutor was a man of noble rank, and that Perronnette, without being a lady of quality, was far better than a servant; and also to perceive that I must myself be high-born, since the queen, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, the prime minister, commended me so earnestly to their care."

Here the young man paused, quite overcome. "And what happened?" asked Aramis.—"It happened, Monsieur," answered he, "that the workmen they had summoned found nothing in the well, after the closest search; that my tutor perceived that the brink was watery; that I was not so well dried by the sun as to escape Dame Perronnette's observing that my garments were moist; and, lastly, that I was seized with a violent fever, owing to the chill and the excitement of my discovery, an attack of delirium supervening, during which I related the whole adventure; so that, guided by my avowal, my tutor found under the bolster the two pieces of the queen's letter."—"Ah!" said Aramis, "now I understand."

"Beyond this, all is conjecture. Doubtless the unfortunate lady and gentleman, not daring to keep the occurrence secret, wrote all to the queen, and sent back to her the torn letter."—"After which," said Aramis, "you were arrested and removed to the Bastille?"—"As you see."—"Then your two attendants disappeared?"—"Alas!"

"Let us not take up our time with the dead, but see what

can be done with the living. You told me you were resigned?" —"I repeat it."—"Without any desire for freedom?"—"As I told you."—"Without ambition, sorrow, or thought?" The young man made no answer. "Well," asked Aramis, "why are you silent?"—"I think that I have spoken enough," answered the prisoner, "and that now it is your turn. I am weary."

Aramis gathered himself up, and a shade of deep solemnity spread itself over his countenance. It was evident that he had reached the crisis in the part he had come to the prison to play. "One question," said Aramis.—"What is it? Speak!" —"In the house you inhabited there were neither looking-glasses nor mirrors, were there?"

"What are those two words, and what is their meaning?" asked the young man; "I do not even know them."—"They designate two pieces of furniture which reflect objects; so that, for instance, you may see in them your own lineaments as you see mine now, with the naked eye."—"No; there was neither a glass nor a mirror in the house," answered the young man.

Aramis looked round him. "Nor is there here, either," he said; "they have taken the same precaution."—"To what end?"—"You will know directly. Now, you have told me that you were instructed in mathematics, astronomy, fencing, and riding; but you have not said a word about history."— "My tutor sometimes related to me the principal deeds of the King Saint Louis, King Francis I., and King Henry IV."

"Is that all?"—"That is about all."—"This also was done by design; just as you were deprived of mirrors, which reflect the present, so you were left in ignorance of history, which reflects the past. Since your imprisonment books have been forbidden you; so that you are unacquainted with a number of facts by means of which you would be able to reconstruct the shattered edifice of your recollections and your interests."— "It is true," said the young man.

"Listen, then: I will in a few words tell you what has passed in France during the last twenty-three or twenty-four years,— that is, from the probable date of your birth; in a word, from the time that interests you."—"Say on!" and the young man resumed his serious and attentive attitude.

"Do you know who was the son of Henry IV.?"—"At least I know who his successor was."—"How?"—"By means of a coin dated 1610, which bears the effigy of Henry IV.; and another of 1612, bearing that of Louis XIII. So I presumed

Digitized by Google

that, there being only two years between the two dates, Louis was Henry's successor."—"Then," said Aramis, "you know that the last reigning monarch was Louis XIII.?"—"I do," answered the youth, slightly reddening.

"Well, he was a prince full of noble ideas and great projects, always, alas! deferred by the troubles of the times and the struggle that his minister Richelieu had to maintain against the great nobles of France. The king himself was of a feeble character, and died young and unhappy."—"I know it."—"He had been long anxious about having an heir,—a care which weighs heavily on princes, who desire to leave behind them more than one pledge that they will be remembered and their work will be continued."

"Did King Louis XIII. die without children?" asked the prisoner, smiling.—"No; but he was long without one, and for a long while thought he should be the last of his race. This idea had reduced him to the depths of despair, when suddenly his wife, Anne of Austria—" The prisoner trembled. "Did you know," said Aramis, "that Louis XIII.'s wife was called Anne of Austria?"—"Continue!" said the young man, without replying to the question.

"When suddenly," resumed Aramis, "the queen announced an interesting event. There was great joy at the intelligence, and all prayed for her happy delivery. On the 5th of September, 1638, she gave birth to a son." Here Aramis looked at his companion, and thought he observed him turning pale. "You are about to hear," said Aramis, "an account which few could now give; for it refers to a secret which is thought to be buried with the dead or entombed in the abyss of the confessional."

"And you will tell me this secret?" broke in the youth.—"Oh!" said Aramis, with unmistakable emphasis, "I do not know that I ought to risk this secret by entrusting it to one who has no desire to quit the Bastille."—"I listen, Monsieur."

"The queen, then, gave birth to a son. But while the court was rejoicing over the event, when the king had shown the newborn child to the nobility and people, and was sitting gaily down to table to celebrate the event, the queen, who was alone in her room, was again taken ill, and gave birth to a second son."—"Oh!" said the prisoner, betraying a better acquaintance with affairs than he had admitted, "I thought that Monsieur was only born in—" Aramis raised his finger. "Let me continue," he said.

The prisoner sighed impatiently, and paused. "Yes," said

Digitized by Google

Aramis, "the queen had a second son, whom Dame Perronnette, the midwife, received in her arms."—"Dame Perronnette!" murmured the young man.

"They ran at once to the banqueting-room, and whispered to the king what had happened; he rose and quitted the table. But this time it was no longer happiness that his face expressed, but something akin to terror. The birth of twins changed into bitterness the joy to which that of an only son had given rise, seeing that in France (a fact of which you are assuredly ignorant) it is the oldest of the king's sons who succeeds his father—"—"I know it."—"And that the doctors and jurists assert that there is ground for doubting whether he who first makes his appearance is the elder by the law of Heaven and of Nature."

The prisoner uttered a smothered cry, and became whiter than the coverlet under which he hid himself. "Now you understand," pursued Aramis, "that the king, who with so much pleasure saw himself repeated in one, was in despair about two; fearing that the second might dispute the claim of the first to seniority, which had been recognised only two hours before, and so this second son, relying on party interests and caprices, might one day sow discord and engender civil war in the kingdom,—by these means destroying the very dynasty he should have strengthened."—"Oh, I understand, I understand!" murmured the young man.

"Well," continued Aramis, "this is what is related; this is why one of the queen's two sons, shamefully parted from his brother, shamefully sequestered, is buried in the profoundest obscurity; this is why that second son has disappeared, and so completely that not a soul in France, save his mother, is aware of his existence."—"Yes; his mother, who has cast him off!" cried the prisoner, in a tone of despair.—"Except also," Aramis went on, "the lady in the black dress; and, finally, excepting—"

"Excepting yourself, is it not,—you, who come and relate all this,—you, who come to rouse in my soul curiosity, hatred, ambition, and perhaps even the thirst of vengeance;—except you, Monsieur, who, if you are the man whom I expect, to whom the note I have received applies, whom, in short, Heaven ought to send me, must possess about you—"—"What?" asked Aramis.—"A portrait of the king, Louis XIV., who at this moment reigns upon the throne of France."

"Here is a portrait," replied the bishop, handing the prisoner a miniature in enamel, on which Louis was depicted life-like, with a handsome, lofty mien. The prisoner eagerly seized the

portrait, and gazed at it with devouring eyes. "And now, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "here is a mirror."

Aramis left the prisoner time to recover his ideas. "So high, so high!" murmured the young man, eagerly comparing the likeness of Louis with his own countenance reflected in the glass. "What do you think of it?" at length said Aramis.—"I think that I am lost," replied the captive; "the king will never set me free."

"And I—I demand," added the bishop, fixing his piercing eyes significantly upon the prisoner,—"I demand which of the two is the king,—the one whom this miniature portrays, or the one whom the glass reflects?"—"The king, Monsieur," sadly replied the young man, "is he who is on the throne, who is not in prison, and who, on the other hand, can cause others to be entombed there. Royalty is power; and you see well how powerless I am."—"Monseigneur," answered Aramis, with a respect he had not yet manifested, "the king, mark me, will, if you desire it, be he who quitting his dungeon shall maintain himself upon the throne on which his friends will place him."

"Tempt me not, Monsieur!" broke in the prisoner, bitterly. —"Be not weak, Monseigneur," persisted Aramis. "I have brought all the proofs of your birth: consult them; satisfy yourself that you are a king's son; and then let us act."—"No, no; it is impossible."

"Unless, indeed," resumed the bishop, ironically, "it be the destiny of your race that the brothers excluded from the throne shall be always princes without valour and without honour, as was your uncle M. Gaston d'Orléans, who ten times conspired against his brother Louis XIII."

"What!" cried the prince, astonished; "my uncle Gaston 'conspired against his brother,'—conspired to dethrone him?" —"Exactly, Monseigneur; for no other reason."—"What are you telling me, Monsieur?"—"I tell you the truth."—"And he had friends,—devoted ones?"—"As much so as I am to you." —"And, after all, what did he do?—Failed!"

"He failed, I admit, but always through his own fault; and for the sake of purchasing, not his life (for the life of the king's brother is sacred and inviolable), but his liberty, he sacrificed the lives of all his friends one after another; and so at this day he is the very shame of history, and the detestation of a hundred noble families in this kingdom."

"I understand, Monsieur; either by weakness or treachery,

my uncle slew his friends."—"By weakness; which in princes is always treachery."—"And cannot a man fail, then, from incapacity and ignorance? Do you really believe it possible that a poor captive such as I, brought up not only at a distance from the court, but even from the world,—do you believe it possible that such a one could assist those of his friends who should attempt to serve him?" And as Aramis was about to reply, the young man suddenly cried out, with a violence which betrayed the temper of his blood: "We are speaking of friends; but how can *I* have any friends,—I, whom no one knows, and who have neither liberty, money, nor influence to gain any?"

"I fancy I had the honour to offer myself to your royal Highness."—"Oh, do not style me so, Monsieur; 'tis either irony or cruelty! Do not lead me to think of aught else than these prison walls which confine me; let me again love, or at least submit to, my slavery and my obscurity."—"Monseigneur, Monseigneur! if you again utter these desperate words, if after having received proof of your high birth you still remain poor-spirited and of feeble purpose, I will comply with your desire,—I will depart, and renounce for ever the service of a master to whom so eagerly I came to devote my assistance and my life!"

"Monsieur," cried the prince, "would it not have been better for you to have reflected, before telling me all that you have done, that you would break my heart for ever?"—"And so I desired to do, Monseigneur."

"Is a prison the fitting place to talk to me about power, grandeur, and even royalty? You wish to make me believe in splendour, and we are lying hidden in night; you boast of glory, and we are smothering our words in the curtains of this miserable bed; you give me glimpses of absolute power, and I hear the step of the jailer in the corridor,—that step which, after all, makes you tremble more than it does me. To render me somewhat less incredulous, free me from the Bastille; give air to my lungs, spurs to my feet, a sword to my arm, and we shall begin to understand each other."—"It is precisely my intention to give you all this, Monseigneur, and more; only, do you desire it?"

"A word more," said the prince. "I know there are guards in every gallery, bolts to every door, cannon and soldiery at every barrier. How will you overcome the sentries, spike the guns? How will you break through the bolts and bars?"—"Monseigneur, how did you get the note which announced my arrival to you?"—"You can bribe a jailer for such a thing as a note."—"If we can corrupt one turnkey, we can corrupt ten."

"Well, I admit that it may be possible to release a poor captive from the Bastille; possible so to conceal him that the king's people shall not again ensnare him; possible, in some unknown retreat, to sustain the unhappy wretch in some suitable manner."—"Monseigneur!" said Aramis, smiling.—"I admit that whoever would do thus much for me would seem more than mortal in my eyes; but as you tell me I am a prince, brother of a king, how can you restore me the rank and power of which my mother and my brother have deprived me? And as I must pass a life of war and hatred, how will you make me conqueror in those combats, and invulnerable to my enemies? Ah, Monsieur, reflect upon this! Place me, to-morrow, in some dark cavern in a mountain's base; yield me the delight of hearing in freedom the sounds of river and plain, of beholding in freedom the sun of the blue heavens, or the stormy sky,—and it is enough. Promise me no more than this,—for, indeed, more you cannot give; and it would be a crime to deceive me, since you call yourself my friend."

Aramis waited in silence. "Monseigneur," he resumed after a moment's reflection, "I admire the firm, sound sense which dictates your words; I am happy to have discovered my monarch's mind."

"Again, again! oh, for mercy's sake," cried the prince, pressing his icy hands upon his clammy brow, "do not play with me! I have no need to be a king to be the happiest of men."—"But I, Monseigneur, wish you to be a king for the good of humanity."—"Ah!" said the prince, with fresh distrust inspired by the word,—"ah! with what, then, has humanity to reproach my brother?"

"I forgot to say, Monseigneur, that if you condescend to allow me to guide you, and if you consent to become the most powerful monarch on earth, you will have promoted the interests of all the friends whom I devote to the success of your cause; and these friends are numerous."—"Numerous?"—"Still less numerous than powerful, Monseigneur."—"Explain yourself."—"It is impossible. I will explain, I swear before Heaven, on that day when I see you sitting on the throne of France."

"But my brother?"—"You shall decree his fate. Do you pity him?"—"Him who leaves me to perish in a dungeon? No! I do not pity him."—"So much the better."

"He might have himself come to this prison, have taken me by the hand, and have said, 'My brother, Heaven created us to love, not to contend with each other. I come to you.

Digitized by Google

A barbarous prejudice has condemned you to pass your days in obscurity, far from all men and deprived of every joy. I will make you sit down beside me; I will buckle round your waist our father's sword. Will you take advantage of this reconciliation to put down or to restrain me? Will you employ that sword to spill my blood?' 'Oh, never!' I would have replied to him; 'I look on you as my preserver, and will respect you as my master. You give me far more than Heaven bestowed; for through you I possess liberty and the privilege of loving and being loved in this world.'"

"And you would have kept your word, Monseigneur?"—"Oh, on my life!"—"While now?"—"While now I perceive that I have guilty ones to punish."—"In what manner, Monseigneur?"

"What do you say as to the resemblance that Heaven has given me to my brother?"—"I say that there was in that likeness a providential instruction which the king ought to have heeded; I say that your mother committed a crime in rendering those different in happiness and fortune whom Nature created so similar in her womb; and I conclude that the object of punishment should be only to restore the equilibrium."—"By which you mean—"—"That if I restore you to your place on your brother's throne, he shall take yours in prison."

"Alas! there is so much suffering in prison, especially to a man who has drunk so deeply of the cup of enjoyment."—"Your royal Highness will always be free to act as you may desire; and if it seems good to you, after punishment, may pardon."

"Good! And now, are you aware of one thing, Monsieur?"—"Tell me, my Prince."—"It is that I will hear nothing further from you till I am clear of the Bastille."—"I was going to say to your Highness that I should only have the pleasure of seeing you once again."—"And when?"—"The day when my Prince leaves these gloomy walls."

"Heavens! how will you give me notice?"—"By coming here to seek you."—"Yourself?"—"My Prince, do not leave this chamber save with me; or if in my absence you are compelled to do so, remember that I am not concerned in it."—"And so, I am not to speak a word of this to any one whatever, save to you?"—"Save only to me." Aramis bowed very low.

The prince offered his hand. "Monsieur," he said, in a tone that issued from his heart, "one word more,—my last. If you have sought me for my destruction; if you are only a tool

in the hands of my enemies; if from our conference, in which you have sounded the depths of my mind, anything worse than captivity result,—that is to say, if death befall me,—still receive my blessing, for you will have ended my troubles and given me repose from the tormenting fever that has preyed upon me these eight years."—"Monseigneur, wait the result ere you judge me," said Aramis.

"I say that in such a case I should bless and forgive you. If, on the other hand, you are come to restore me to that position in the sunshine of fortune and glory to which I was destined by Heaven; if by your aid I am enabled to live in the memory of man, and confer lustre on my race by deeds of valour or by solid benefits bestowed upon my people; if from my present depths of sorrow, aided by your generous hand, I raise myself to the very height of honour,—then to you, whom I thank with blessings, to you will I offer half my power and my glory; though you would still be but partly recompensed, and your share must always remain incomplete, since I could not divide with you the happiness received at your hands."

"Monseigneur," replied Aramis, moved by the pallor and excitement of the young man, "the nobleness of your heart fills me with joy and admiration. It is not you who will have to thank me, but rather the nation whom you will render happy, the posterity whose name you will make glorious. Yes; I shall have bestowed upon you more than life,—I shall give you immortality."

The prince offered his hand to Aramis, who sank upon his knee and kissed it. "Oh!" cried the prince, with a charming modesty.—"It is the first act of homage paid to our future king," said Aramis. "When I see you again, I shall say, 'Good-day, Sire.'"

"Till then," said the young man, pressing his wan and wasted fingers over his heart,—"till then, no more dreams, no more strain upon my life,—it would break! Oh, Monsieur, how small is my prison,—how low the window,—how narrow are the doors! To think that so much pride, splendour, and happiness should be able to enter in and remain here!"—"Your royal Highness makes me proud," said Aramis, "since you imply it is I who brought all this;" and he rapped immediately on the door.

The jailer came to open it with Baisemeaux, who devoured by fear and uneasiness was beginning, in spite of himself, to listen at the door. Happily, neither of the speakers had

forgotten to smother his voice, even in the most passionate outbreaks.

"What a confession!" said the governor, forcing a laugh; "who would believe that a mere recluse, a man almost dead, could have committed crimes so numerous, and taking so long to tell of?" Aramis made no reply. He was eager to leave the Bastille, where the secret which overwhelmed him seemed to double the weight of the walls.

As soon as they reached Baisemeaux's quarters, "Let us proceed to business, my dear governor," said Aramis.—"Alas!" replied Baisemeaux.—"You have to ask me for my receipt for one hundred and fifty thousand livres," said the bishop.—"And to pay over the first third of the sum," added the poor governor, with a sigh, taking three steps towards his iron strong-box.

"Here is the receipt," said Aramis.—"And here is the money," returned Baisemeaux, with a threefold sigh.—"The order instructed me only to give a receipt; it said nothing about receiving the money," rejoined Aramis. "Adieu, Monsieur the Governor!" And he departed, leaving Baisemeaux stifled with joy and surprise at this regal gift so grandly given by the Confessor Extraordinary to the Bastille.

CHAPTER CCVIII

HOW MOUSTON HAD BECOME FATTER WITHOUT GIVING PORTHOS NOTICE THEREOF, AND OF THE TROUBLES WHICH CONSEQUENTLY BEFELL THAT WORTHY GENTLEMAN

After the departure of Athos for Blois, Porthos and D'Artagnan were seldom together. One was occupied with harassing duties for the king; the other had been making many purchases of furniture, which he intended to forward to his estate, and by aid of which he hoped to establish in his various residences something of that court luxury which he had witnessed in all its dazzling brightness in his Majesty's society.

D'Artagnan, ever faithful, one morning during an interval of service thought about Porthos, and being uneasy at not having heard anything of him for a fortnight, directed his steps towards his hotel, and pounced upon him just as he was getting up. The worthy baron had a pensive,—nay, more, a melancholy air. He was sitting on his bed, only half dressed, and

with legs dangling over the edge, contemplating a great number of garments, which with their fringes, lace, embroidery, and slashes of ill-assorted hues were strewed all over the floor. Porthos, sad and reflective as La Fontaine's hare, did not observe D'Artagnan's entrance, which was moreover screened at this moment by M. Mouston, whose personal corpulence, quite enough at any time to hide one man from another, was for the moment doubled by a scarlet coat which the intendant was holding up by the sleeves for his master's inspection, that he might the better see it all over. D'Artagnan stopped at the threshold, and looked at the pensive Porthos; and then, as the sight of the innumerable garments strewing the floor caused mighty sighs to heave from the bosom of that excellent gentleman, D'Artagnan thought it time to put an end to these dismal reflections, and coughed by way of announcing himself.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, whose countenance brightened with joy, "ah! ah! Here is D'Artagnan. I shall, then, get hold of an idea!" At these words Mouston, doubting what was going on behind him, got out of the way, smiling kindly at the friend of his master, who thus found himself freed from the material obstacle which had prevented his reaching D'Artagnan. Porthos made his sturdy knees crack again in rising, and crossing the room in two strides found himself face to face with his friend, whom he folded to his breast with a force of affection that seemed to increase with every day. "Ah!" he repeated, "you are always welcome, dear friend; but just now you are more welcome than ever."

"But you seem in the dumps here?" exclaimed D'Artagnan. Porthos replied by a look expressive of dejection. "Well then, tell me all about it, Porthos, my friend, unless it is a secret."—"In the first place," returned Porthos, "you know I have no secrets from you. This, then, is what saddens me."

"Wait a minute, Porthos; let me first get rid of all this litter of satin and velvet."—"Oh, never mind!" said Porthos, contemptuously; "it is all trash."—"Trash, Porthos! Cloth at twenty livres an ell, gorgeous satin, regal velvet!"—"Then you think these clothes are—"—"Splendid, Porthos, splendid. I'll wager that you alone in France have so many; and suppose you never had any more made, and were to live a hundred years, which wouldn't astonish me, you could still wear a new dress the day of your death without being obliged to see the nose of a single tailor from now till then."

Porthos shook his head. "Come, my friend," said D'Arta-

Digitized by Google

gnan," this unnatural melancholy in you frightens me. My dear Porthos, pray get out of it, then; and the sooner the better."—"Yes, my friend, so I will; if indeed it is possible."—"Perhaps you have received bad news from Bracieux?"—"No; they have felled the wood, and it has yielded a third more than the estimate."—"Then has there been a falling off in the pools of Pierrefonds?"—"No, my friend; they have been fished, and there is enough left to stock all the pools in the neighbourhood."

"Perhaps your estate at Vallon has been destroyed by an earthquake?"—"No, my friend; on the contrary, the ground was struck by lightning a hundred paces from the château, and a fountain sprung up in a place entirely destitute of water."—"What in the world is the matter, then?"—"The fact is, I have received an invitation for the *fête* at Vaux," said Porthos, with a lugubrious expression.

"Well, do you complain of that? The king has caused a hundred mortal heart-burnings among the courtiers by refusing invitations. And so, my dear friend, you are of the party for Vaux? Bless my soul!"—"Indeed, I am!"—"You will see a magnificent sight."—"Alas! I doubt it, though."—"Everything that is grand in France will be brought together there!"—"Ah!" cried Porthos, tearing out a lock of his hair in despair.—"Eh! Good heavens! are you ill?" cried D'Artagnan.—"I am as strong as the Pont-Neuf! It isn't that."—"But what is it, then?"—"It is that I have no clothes!"

D'Artagnan stood petrified. "No clothes, Porthos! no clothes," he cried, "when I see more than fifty suits on the floor!"—"Fifty, yes; but not one that fits me!"—"What! not one that fits you? But are you not measured, then, when you give an order?"—"To be sure, he is," answered Mouston; "but unfortunately I have grown stouter."

"What! you stouter?"—"So much so that I am now bigger than the baron. Would you believe it, Monsieur?"—"*Parbleu!* it seems to me that is quite evident."—"Do you see, stupid?" said Porthos; "that is quite evident!"—"Be still, my dear Porthos!" resumed D'Artagnan, becoming slightly impatient. "I don't understand why your clothes should not fit you because Mouston has grown stouter."

"I am going to explain it," said Porthos. "You remember having related to me the story of the Roman general Antony, who had always seven wild boars, kept roasting, cooked to different degrees, so that he might be able to have his dinner at any time of the day he chose to ask for it? Well, then, I

resolved, as at any time I might be invited to court to spend a week,—I resolved to have always seven suits ready for the occasion."—"Capitally reasoned, Porthos! Only, a man must have a fortune like yours to gratify such whims. Without counting the time lost in being measured, the fashions are always changing."—"That is exactly the point," said Porthos, "in regard to which I flattered myself I had hit on a very ingenious device."

"Tell me what it is; for I don't doubt your genius."—"You remember that Mouston once was thin?"—"Yes; when he was called Mousqueton."—"And you remember, too, the period when he began to grow fatter?"—"No, not exactly. I beg your pardon, my good Mouston."—"Oh, you are not in fault, Monsieur!" said Mouston, graciously. "You were in Paris; and as for us, we were in Pierrefonds."

"Well, well, my dear Porthos; there was a time when Mouston began to grow fat. Is that what you wished to say?"—"Yes, my friend; and I greatly rejoiced over it at that time."—"Indeed, I believe you did," exclaimed D'Artagnan.—"You understand," continued Porthos, "what a world of trouble it spared me."—"No, my dear friend, I do not yet understand; but perhaps with the help of explanation—"—"Here it is, my friend. In the first place, as you have said, to be measured is a loss of time, even though it occur only once a fortnight. And then, one may be travelling, and may wish to have seven suits always ready. In short, I have a horror of letting any one take my measure. Confound it! either one is a gentleman or he is not. To be scrutinised and scanned by a fellow who completely analyses you by inch and line,—'tis degrading. Here, they find you too hollow; there, too prominent. They recognise your strong and weak points. See, now, when we leave the measurer's hands, we are like those strongholds whose angles and different thicknesses have been ascertained by a spy."

"In truth, my dear Porthos, you possess ideas entirely your own."—"Ah! you see, when a man is an engineer—"—"And has fortified Belle-Isle,—'tis natural, my friend."—"Well, I had an idea, which would doubtless have proved a good one but for Mouston's carelessness." D'Artagnan glanced at Mouston, who replied by a slight movement of his body, as if to say, "You will see whether I am at all to blame in all this."

"I congratulated myself, then," resumed Porthos, "at seeing Mouston get fat; and I did all I could, by means of substantial feeding, to make him stout,—always in the hope that he would

come to equal myself in girth, and could then be measured in my stead."—"Ah," cried D'Artagnan, "I see! That spared you both time and humiliation."

"Consider my joy when after a year and a half's judicious feeding,—for I used to feed him myself,—the fellow—"—"Oh, I lent a good hand myself, Monsieur!" said Mouston, humbly. —"That's true. Consider my joy when one morning I perceived Mouston was obliged, like myself, to compress himself to get through the little secret door that those fools of architects had made in the chamber of the late Madame du Vallon, in the château of Pierrefonds. And, by the way, about that door, my friend, I should like to ask you, who know everything, why these wretches of architects, who ought by rights to have the compasses in their eye, came to make doorways through which nobody but thin people could pass?"

"Oh! those doors," answered D'Artagnan, "were meant for gallants, and they have generally slight and slender figures."—"Madame du Vallon had no gallant!" answered Porthos, majestically.—"Perfectly true, my friend," resumed D'Artagnan; "but the architects were imagining the possibility of your marrying again."

"Ah, that is possible!" said Porthos. "And now that I have received an explanation why doorways are made too narrow, let us return to the subject of Mouston's fatness. But see how the two things fit each other! I have always noticed that ideas run parallel. And so, observe this phenomenon, D'Artagnan! I was talking to you of Mouston, who is fat, and it led us on to Madame du Vallon—"—"Who was thin?"—"Hum! is it not marvellous?"—"My dear friend, a *savant* of my acquaintance, M. Costar, has made the same observation as you have; and he calls the process by some Greek name, which I forget."—"What! my remark is not then original?" cried Porthos, astounded. "I thought I was the discoverer."

"My friend, the fact was known before Aristotle's days,—that is to say, about two thousand years ago."—"Well, well, 'tis no less true," remarked Porthos, delighted at the idea of having concurred with the sages of antiquity.—"Wonderfully. But suppose we return to Mouston. It seems to me, we have left him fattening under our very eyes."—"Yes, Monsieur," said Mouston.

"Well," said Porthos, "Mouston fattened so well that he gratified all my hopes by reaching my standard; a fact of which I was well able to convince myself, by seeing the rascal one day

in a waistcoat of mine, which he had turned into a coat,—a waistcoat the mere embroidery of which was worth a hundred pistoles."—" 'Twas only to try it on, Monsieur," said Mouston.

" From that moment I determined to put Mouston in communication with my tailors, and to have him measured instead of myself."—" A capital idea, Porthos; but Mouston is a foot and a half shorter than you."

" Exactly! They measured him down to the ground, and the end of the skirt came just below my knee."—" What a wonder you are, Porthos! Such a thing could happen only to you."—" Ah, yes, pay your compliments; there is something upon which to base them! It was exactly at that time—that is to say, nearly two years and a half ago—that I set out for Belle-Isle, instructing Mouston (so as always to have, in every event, a pattern of every fashion) to have a coat made for himself every month."—" And did Mouston neglect to comply with your instructions? Ah, that would not be right, Mouston! "—" No, Monsieur, quite the contrary, quite the contrary! "—" No, he never forgot to have his coats made; but he forgot to inform me that he had grown stouter! "

" But it was not my fault, Monsieur! Your tailor never told me."—" And this to such an extent, Monsieur," continued Porthos, " that the fellow in two years has gained eighteen inches in girth, and so my last dozen coats are all too large in progressive measure from a foot to a foot and a half! "—" But the rest,—those which were made when you were of the same size? "—" They are no longer the fashion, my dear friend. Were I to put them on, I should look like a fresh arrival from Siam, and as though I had been two years away from court."

" I understand your difficulty. You have how many new suits?—thirty-six, and yet not one to wear. Well, you must have a thirty-seventh made, and give the thirty-six to Mouston." —" Ah, Monsieur! " said Mouston, with a gratified air. " The truth is, that Monsieur has always been very generous to me." —" Do you mean to think that I hadn't that idea, or that I was deterred by the expense? But it wants only two days to the *fête*. I received the invitation yesterday; made Mouston post hither with my wardrobe, and only this morning discovered my misfortune; and from now till the day after to-morrow, there isn't a single fashionable tailor who will undertake to make me a suit."—" That is to say, one covered with gold, isn't it? " —" I especially wish it so! "

" Oh, we shall manage it! You won't leave for three days.

Digitized by Google

The invitations are for Wednesday, and this is only Sunday morning."—"'Tis true; but Aramis has strongly advised me to be at Vaux twenty-four hours beforehand."—"How! Aramis?"—"Yes, it was Aramis who brought me the invitation."—"Ah, to be sure, I see! You are invited on the part of M. Fouquet?"—"By no means,—by the king, dear friend. The letter bears the following as large as life: 'M. le Baron du Vallon is informed that the king has condescended to place him on the invitation list—'"—"Very good; but you leave with M. Fouquet?"

"And when I think," cried Porthos, stamping on the floor,—"when I think I shall have no clothes, I am ready to burst with rage! I should like to strangle somebody or destroy something!"—"Neither strangle anybody nor destroy anything, Porthos; I will manage it all. Put on one of your thirty-six suits, and come with me to a tailor."—"Pooh! my agent has seen them all this morning."—"Even M. Percerin?"—"Who is M. Percerin?"—"He is the king's tailor, *parbleu!*"

"Oh! ah, yes!" said Porthos, who wished to appear to know the king's tailor, but now heard his name mentioned for the first time; "to M. Percerin's, by Jove! I thought he would be too much engaged."—"Doubtless he will be; but be at ease, Porthos! He will do for me what he won't do for another. Only, you must allow yourself to be measured!"—"Ah!" said Porthos, with a sigh, "'tis vexatious, but what would you have me do?"—"Do? As others do,—as the king does."—"What! Do they measure the king too? Does *he* put up with it?"—"The king is a beau, my good friend; and so are you, too, whatever you may say about it." Porthos smiled triumphantly. "Let us go to the king's tailor," he said; "and since he measures the king, I think, by my faith, I may well allow him to measure me!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCIX

WHO MESSIRE JEAN PERCERIN WAS

THE king's tailor, Messire Jean Percerin, occupied a rather large house in the Rue St. Honoré, near the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec. He was a man of great taste in elegant stuffs, embroideries, and velvet, being hereditary tailor to the king. The preferment of his house reached as far back as the time of Charles IX.; from whose reign dated, as we know, fancies in *bravery* difficult enough to gratify. The Percerin of that period was a Huguenot, like Ambroise Paré, and had been spared by the Queen of Navarre, —the beautiful Margot, as they used to write and say too in those days,—because, in sooth, he was the only one who could make for her those wonderful riding-habits which she preferred to wear, seeing that they were marvellously well suited to hide certain anatomical defects which the Queen of Navarre used very studiously to conceal. Percerin being saved made, out of gratitude, some beautiful black bodices, very inexpensive indeed, for Queen Catherine, who ended by being pleased at the preservation of a Huguenot on whom she had long looked with aversion. But Percerin was a prudent man; and having heard it said that there was no more dangerous sign for a Huguenot than to be smiled upon by Catherine, and having observed that her smiles were more frequent than usual, he speedily turned Catholic, with all his family; and having thus become irreproachable, attained the lofty position of master tailor to the crown of France. Under Henry III., gay king as he was, this position was as high as one of the loftiest peaks of the Cordilleras. Now, Percerin had been a clever man all his life, and by way of keeping up his reputation beyond the grave, took very good care not to make a bad death of it; and so contrived to die very seasonably,—at the very moment he felt his powers of invention declining. He left a son and daughter, both worthy of the name they were called upon to bear,—the son a cutter as unerring and exact as the square rule, the daughter apt at embroidery and at designing ornaments. The marriage of Henry IV. and Marie de Médicis, and the exquisite court mourning for the aforementioned queen, together with a few words let fall by M. de Bassompierre, king of the beaux of that period, made the fortune of the second generation of Percerins.

M. Concino Concini, and his wife Galigaï, who subsequently shone at the French court, sought to Italianise the fashion, and introduced some Florentine tailors; but Percerin, touched to the quick in his patriotism and his self-esteem, entirely defeated these foreigners by his designs in brocatelle,—so effectually that Concino was the first to give up his compatriots, and held the French tailor in such esteem that he would never employ any other; and thus wore a doublet of his on the very day that Vitry blew out his brains with his pistol at the Pont du Louvre.

It was that doublet, issuing from M. Percerin's workshop, which the Parisians rejoiced in hacking into so many pieces with the human flesh it covered. Notwithstanding the favour Concino Concini had shown Percerin, the king Louis XIII. had the generosity to bear no malice to his tailor and to retain him in his service. At the time when Louis the Just afforded this great example of equity, Percerin had brought up two sons, one of whom made his début at the marriage of Anne of Austria, invented that admirable Spanish costume in which Richelieu danced a saraband, made the costumes for the tragedy of *Mirame*, and stitched on to Buckingham's mantle those famous pearls which were destined to be scattered on the floors of the Louvre. A man becomes easily illustrious who has made the dresses of M. de Buckingham, M. de Cinq-Mars, Mademoiselle Ninon, M. de Beaufort, and Marion de Lorme. And thus Percerin III. had attained the summit of his glory when his father died. This same Percerin III., old, famous, and wealthy, yet further dressed Louis XIV.; and having no son, which was a great cause of sorrow to him, seeing that with himself his dynasty would end, he had brought up several hopeful pupils. He possessed a carriage, a country-house, lackeys the tallest in Paris; and by special authority from Louis XIV., a pack of hounds. He worked for Messieurs de Lyonne and Letellier, under a sort of patronage; but, politic man as he was, and versed in State secrets, he never succeeded in fitting M. Colbert. This is beyond explanation; it is matter for intuition. Great geniuses of every kind live upon unseen, intangible ideas; they act without themselves knowing why. The great Percerin (for, contrary to the rule of dynasties, it was, above all, the last of the Percerins who deserved the name of Great),—the great Percerin was inspired when he cut a robe for the queen or a coat for the king; he could invent a mantle for Monsieur, a clock for Madame's stocking; but in spite of his supreme genius,

he could never hit the measure of M. Colbert. "That man," he used often to say, "is beyond my art; my needle never can hit him off." We need scarcely say that Percerin was M. Fouquet's tailor, and that the superintendent highly esteemed him.

M. Percerin was nearly eighty years old,—nevertheless, still fresh, and at the same time so dry, the courtiers used to say, that he was positively brittle. His renown and his fortune were great enough for Monsieur the Prince, that king of fops, to take his arm when talking over the fashions; and for those least eager to pay never to dare to leave their accounts in arrear with him,—for M. Percerin would for the first time make clothes upon credit, but the second never, unless paid for the former order. It is easy to see that a tailor of such standing, instead of running after customers, would make difficulties about receiving new ones. And so Percerin declined to fit *bourgeois*, or those who had but recently obtained patents of nobility. It was stated, even, that M. de Mazarin, in return for a full suit of ceremonial vestments as cardinal, one fine day slipped letters of nobility into his pocket. Percerin was endowed with intelligence and wit. He might be called very lively. At eighty years of age he still took with a steady hand the measure of women's waists.

It was to the house of this great lord of tailors that D'Artagnan took the despairing Porthos; who, as they were going along, said to his friend: "Take care, my good D'Artagnan, not to compromise the dignity of a man such as I am with the arrogance of this Percerin, who will, I expect, be very impertinent; for I give you notice, my friend, that if he is wanting in respect to me I will chastise him."—"Presented by me," replied D'Artagnan, "you have nothing to fear, even though you were—what you are not."—"Ah! 'tis because—"

"What! Have you anything against Percerin, Porthos?"—"I think that I once sent Mouston to a fellow of that name."—"And then?"—"The fellow refused to supply me."—"Oh, a misunderstanding, no doubt, which 'tis pressing to set right! Mouston must have made a mistake."—"Perhaps."—"He has confused the names."—"Possibly. That rascal Mouston never can remember names."—"I will take it all upon myself."—"Very good."

"Stop the carriage, Porthos; here we are!"—"Here! how here? We are at the Halles; and you told me the house was at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec."—"'Tis true; but look!"—"Well, I do look, and I see—"—"What?"—"*Pardieu!* that we are at the Halles!"

Digitized by Google

"You do not, I suppose, want our horses to clamber up on the top of the carriage in front of us?"—"No."—"Nor the carriage in front of us to mount on the one in front of it?"—"Still less."—"Nor that the second should be driven over the roofs of the thirty or forty others which have arrived before us?"—"No; you are right, indeed. What a number of people! And what are they all about?"—"'Tis very simple,—they are waiting their turn."

"Bah! Have the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne shifted their quarters?"—"No; their turn to obtain an entrance to M. Percerin's house."—"And we are going to wait too?"—"Oh, we shall show ourselves more ready and less proud than they!"—"What are we to do, then?"—"Get down, pass through the footmen and lackeys, and enter the tailor's house, which I will answer for our doing, especially if you go first."—"Come, then," said Porthos.

They both alighted, and made their way on foot towards the establishment. The cause of the confusion was that M. Percerin's doors were closed, while a servant standing before them was explaining to the illustrious customers of the illustrious tailor that just then M. Percerin could not receive anybody. It was bruited about outside still, on the authority of what the great lackey had said confidentially to some great noble whom he favoured, that M. Percerin was engaged upon five dresses for the king, and that, owing to the urgency of the case, he was meditating in his office on the ornaments, colours, and cut of these five suits. Some, contented with this reason, went away again, happy to repeat it to others; but others, more tenacious, insisted on having the doors opened,—and among these last, three Blue Ribbons, intended to take part in a ballet which would inevitably fail unless the said three had their costumes shaped by the very hand of the great Percerin himself.

D'Artagnan, pushing on Porthos, who scattered the groups of people right and left, succeeded in gaining the counter behind which the journeymen tailors were doing their best to answer questions. We forgot to mention that at the door they wanted to put off Porthos, like the rest; but D'Artagnan, showing himself, pronounced merely these words, "The king's order," and was let in with his friend. Those poor devils had enough to do, and did their best, to reply to the demands of the customers in the absence of their master, leaving off drawing a stitch to turn a sentence; and when wounded pride or disappointed expectation brought down upon them too cutting rebukes, he

who was attacked made a dive and disappeared under the counter.

The line of discontented lords formed a picture full of curious details. Our captain of musketeers, a man of sure and rapid observation, took it all in at a glance; but having run over the groups, his eye rested on a man in front of him. This man, seated upon a stool, scarcely showed his head above the counter which sheltered him. He was about forty years of age, with a melancholy aspect, pale face, and soft luminous eyes. He was looking at D'Artagnan and the rest, with his chin resting upon his hand, like a calm and inquiring spectator. Only, on perceiving and doubtless recognising our captain, he pulled his hat down over his eyes. It was this action, perhaps, that attracted D'Artagnan's attention. If so, the gentleman who had pulled down his hat produced an effect entirely different from what he had desired. In other respects, his costume was plain, and his hair evenly cut enough for customers who were not close observers to take him for a mere tailor's apprentice perched behind the board and carefully stitching cloth or velvet. Nevertheless, this man held up his head too often to be very productively employed with his fingers. D'Artagnan was not deceived,—not he; and he saw at once that if this man was working on anything, it certainly was not on cloth.

"Eh!" said he, addressing this man, "and so you have become a tailor's boy, M. Molière?"—"Hush, M. d'Artagnan!" replied the man, softly; "in Heaven's name! you will make them recognise me."—"Well, and what harm?"—"The fact is, there is no harm; but—"—"You were going to say there is no good in doing it, either, is it not so?"—"Alas! no; for I was occupied in looking at some excellent figures."

"Go on, go on, M. Molière! I quite understand the interest you take in it. I will not disturb your study."—"Thank you."—"But on one condition,—that you tell me where M. Percerin really is."—"Oh, willingly! in his own room. Only—"—"Only that one can't enter it?"—"Unapproachable."—"For everybody?"—"For everybody. He brought me here, so that I might be at my ease to make my observations, and then he went away."

"Well, my dear M. Molière, but you will go and tell him I am here."—"I!" exclaimed Molière, in the tone of a courageous dog from which you snatch the bone it has legitimately gained; "I disturb myself! Ah, M. d'Artagnan, how hard you are upon me!"—"If you don't go directly and tell M. Percerin

that I am here, my dear Molière," said D'Artagnan, in a low tone, "I warn you of one thing,—that I won't exhibit to you the friend I have brought with me."

Molière indicated Porthos by an imperceptible gesture. "This gentleman, is it not?"—"Yes." Molière fixed upon Porthos one of those looks which penetrate the minds and hearts of men. The subject doubtless appeared very promising to him, for he immediately rose and led the way into the adjoining chamber.

CHAPTER CCX

THE SAMPLES

DURING all this time the crowd was slowly rolling on, leaving at every angle of the counter either a murmur or a menace, as the waves leave foam or scattered seaweed on the sands, when they retire with the ebbing tide. In about ten minutes Molière reappeared, making another sign to D'Artagnan from under the hangings. The latter hurried after him, with Porthos in the rear, and after threading a labyrinth of corridors, introduced him to M. Percerin's room. The old man, with his sleeves turned up, was gathering up in folds a piece of gold-flowered brocade, so as the better to exhibit its lustre. Perceiving D'Artagnan, he put the silk aside, and came to meet him, by no means radiant and by no means courteous, but on the whole in a tolerably civil manner. "The captain of the musketeers will excuse me, I am sure, for I am engaged."

"Eh! yes, on the king's costumes; I know that, my dear M. Percerin. You are making three, they tell me."—"Five, my dear Monsieur,—five!"—"Three or five, 'tis all the same to me, my dear Monsieur; and I know that you will make them most exquisitely."—"Yes, I know. Once made, they will be the most beautiful in the world, I do not deny it; but that they may be the most beautiful in the world, they must first be made; and to do this, Captain, I am pressed for time."—"Oh, bah! there are two days yet; 'tis much more than you require, M. Percerin," said D'Artagnan, in the coolest possible manner.

Percerin raised his head with the air of a man little accustomed to be contradicted, even in his whims; but D'Artagnan did not pay the least attention to the airs which the illustrious tailor began to assume. "My dear M. Percerin," he continued,

"I bring you a customer."—"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Percerin, crossly.—"M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," continued D'Artagnan.

Percerin attempted a bow, which found no favour in the eyes of the terrible Porthos, who from his first entry into the room had been regarding the tailor askance. "A very good friend of mine," concluded D'Artagnan.—"I will attend to Monsieur," said Percerin, "but later."—"Later? but when?"—"Why, when I have time."

"You have already told my valet as much," broke in Porthos, discontentedly.—"Very likely," said Percerin; "I am nearly always pushed for time."—"My friend," returned Porthos, sententiously, "there is always time when one chooses to find it." Percerin turned crimson,—a very ominous sign indeed in old men blanched by age. "Monsieur," said he, "is very free to confer his custom elsewhere."

"Come, come, Percerin," interposed D'Artagnan, "you are not in a good temper to-day. Well, I will say one more word to you, which will bring you on your knees: Monsieur is not only a friend of mine, but more,—a friend of M. Fouquet."—"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the tailor, "that is another thing." Then turning to Porthos, "Monsieur the Baron is attached to the superintendent?" he inquired.—"I am attached to myself," shouted Porthos, at the very moment when the tapestry was raised to introduce a new speaker in the dialogue. Molière was all observation; D'Artagnan laughed; Porthos swore.

"My dear Percerin," said D'Artagnan, "you will make a dress for the baron? 'Tis I who ask you."—"To you I will not say nay, Captain."—"But that is not all; you will make it for him at once."—"'Tis impossible before eight days."—"That, then, is as much as to refuse, because the dress is wanted for the *fête* at Vaux."—"I repeat that it is impossible," returned the obstinate old man.

"By no means, dear M. Percerin, above all if *I* ask you," said a mild voice at the door,—a silvery voice which made D'Artagnan prick up his ears. It was the voice of Aramis. "M. d'Herblay!" cried the tailor.—"Aramis!" murmured D'Artagnan.—"Ah, our bishop!" said Porthos.

"Good-morning, D'Artagnan; good-morning, Porthos; good-morning, my dear friends," said Aramis. "Come, come, M. Percerin, make the baron's dress, and I will answer for it you will gratify M. Fouquet;" and he accompanied the words with a sign which seemed to say, "Agree, and dismiss them."

It appeared that Aramis had over M. Percerin an influence superior even to D'Artagnan's; for the tailor bowed in assent, and turning round upon Porthos, "Go and get measured on the other side," said he, rudely. Porthos coloured in a formidable manner. D'Artagnan saw the storm coming, and addressing Molière said to him in an undertone, "You see before you, my dear Monsieur, a man who considers himself disgraced if you measure the flesh and bones that Heaven has given him; study this type for me, Aristophanes, and profit by it."

Molière had no need of encouragement, and his gaze dwelt upon the baron Porthos. "Monsieur," he said, "if you will come with me, I will make them take your measure without the measurer touching you."—"Oh!" said Porthos, "how do you make that out, my friend?"—"I say that they shall apply neither line nor rule to the seams of your dress. It is a new method we have invented for measuring people of quality, who are too sensitive to allow low-born fellows to touch them. We know some susceptible persons who will not put up with being measured,—a process which, as I think, wounds the natural dignity of man; and if perchance Monsieur should be one of these—"—"*Corbœuf!* I believe I am one of them."—"Well, that is a capital coincidence, and you will have the benefit of our invention."

"But how in the devil can it be done?" asked Porthos, delighted.—"Monsieur," said Molière, bowing, "if you will deign to follow me, you will see."

Aramis observed this scene with all his eyes. Perhaps he fancied from D'Artagnan's liveliness that he would leave with Porthos, so as not to lose the conclusion of a scene so well begun. But, clear-sighted as he was, Aramis deceived himself. Porthos and Molière left together. D'Artagnan remained with Percerin.

Why? From curiosity, doubtless; probably to enjoy a little longer the society of his good friend Aramis. As Molière and Porthos disappeared, D'Artagnan drew near the Bishop of Vannes,—a proceeding which appeared particularly to disconcert him. "A dress for you also, is it not, my friend?" Aramis smiled. "No," said he.—"You will go to Vaux, however?"—"I shall go, but without a new dress. You forget, dear D'Artagnan, that a poor bishop of Vannes is not rich enough to have new dresses for every *fête*."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, laughing; "and do we write no more poems now, either?"—"Oh, D'Artagnan," exclaimed Aramis, "I have long given over all these follies!"—"True,"

repeated D'Artagnan, only half convinced. As for Percerin, he had relapsed into his contemplation of the brocades.

"Don't you perceive," said Aramis, smiling, "that we are greatly boring this good gentleman, my dear D'Artagnan?"—"Ah! ah!" murmured the musketeer, aside; "that is, I am boring you, my friend." Then aloud, "Well, then, let us leave. I have no further business here; and if you are as disengaged as I, Aramis—"—"No; not I—I wished—"

"Ah! you had something private to say to M. Percerin? Why did you not tell me so at once?"—"Something private, certainly," repeated Aramis, "but not from you, D'Artagnan. I hope you will believe that I can never have anything so private to say that a friend like you may not hear it."—"Oh, no, no! I am going," said D'Artagnan, but imparting to his voice an evident tone of curiosity; for Aramis's annoyance, well dissembled as it was, had not escaped him, and he knew that in that impenetrable mind even the most apparently trivial thing was designed to some end,—an unknown one, but one which from the knowledge he had of his friend's character the musketeer felt must be important.

On his part, Aramis saw that D'Artagnan was not without suspicion, and pressed him. "Stay, by all means!" he said; "this is what it is." Then turning towards the tailor, "My dear Percerin," said he.—"I am even very happy that you are here, D'Artagnan."—"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Gascon, for the third time, even less deceived this time than before. Percerin never movèd. Aramis roused him violently, by snatching from his hands the stuff upon which he was engaged. "My dear Percerin," said he, "I have near at hand M. Lebrun, one of M. Fouquet's painters."—"Ah, very good!" thought D'Artagnan; "but why Lebrun?"

Aramis looked at D'Artagnan, who seemed to be occupied with an engraving of Mark Antony. "And you wish to have made for him a dress similar to those of the Epicureans?" answered Percerin; and while saying this in an absent manner, the worthy tailor endeavoured to recapture his piece of brocade. "An Epicurean's dress?" asked D'Artagnan, in a tone of inquiry.

"I see," said Aramis, with a most engaging smile; "it is written that our dear D'Artagnan shall know all our secrets this evening. Yes, my friend, you have surely heard speak of M. Fouquet's Epicureans, have you not?"—"Undoubtedly. Is it not a kind of poetical society, of which La Fontaine Loret,

Pellisson, and Molière are members, and which holds its sittings at St. Mandé? "—"Exactly so. Well, we are going to put our poets in uniform, and enroll them in the service of the king."

"Oh, very well! I understand,—a surprise M. Fouquet is getting up for the king. Be at ease; if that is the secret about M. Lebrun, I will not mention it."—"Always agreeable, my friend! No, M. Lebrun has nothing to do with this part of it; the secret which concerns him is far more important than the other."—"Then, if it is so important as all that, I prefer not to know it," said D'Artagnan, making a show of departure.

"Come in, M. Lebrun, come in!" said Aramis, opening a side-door with his right hand and holding back D'Artagnan with his left.—"I' faith, I too am quite in the dark," quoth Percerin.

Aramis took an "opportunity," as is said in theatrical matters. "My dear M. Percerin," he continued, "you are making five dresses for the king, are you not?—one in brocade, one in hunting-cloth, one in velvet, one in satin, and one in Florentine stuffs?"—"Yes; but how do you know all that, Monseigneur?" said Percerin, astounded.—"It is all very simple, my dear Monsieur. There will be a hunt, a banquet, a concert, a promenade, and a reception; these five kinds of dress are required by etiquette."—"You know everything, Monseigneur!"—"And a great many more things too," murmured D'Artagnan.

"But," cried the tailor, in triumph, "what you do not know, Monseigneur, prince of the church though you are; what nobody will know; what only the king, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and myself do know,—is the colour of the materials, the nature of the ornaments, and the cut, the *ensemble*, the finish of it all!"—"Well," said Aramis, "that is precisely what I have come to ask you, dear Percerin."—"Ah, bah!" exclaimed the tailor, terrified, though Aramis had pronounced these words in his sweetest and most honeyed voice. The request appeared, on reflection, so exaggerated, so ridiculous, so monstrous to M. Percerin that first he laughed to himself, then aloud, and finished with a shout. D'Artagnan followed his example, not because he found the matter so "very funny," but in order not to allow Aramis to cool.

Aramis suffered them to laugh, and then, when they had become quiet, "At first view," said he, "I appear to be hazarding an absurd question, do I not? But D'Artagnan, who is incarnate wisdom itself, will tell you that I could not do otherwise than ask you this."—"Let us see," said the attentive

musketeer, perceiving with his wonderful instinct that they had only been skirmishing till now, and that the moment of battle was approaching.—"Let us see," said Percerin, incredulously.

"Why, now," continued Aramis, "does M. Fouquet give the king a *fête?* Is it not to please him?"—"Assuredly," said Percerin. D'Artagnan nodded assent. "By delicate attentions, by some happy device, by a succession of surprises, like that of which we were talking,—the enrolment of our Epicureans?"—"Admirable."

"Well, then, this is the surprise we intend, my good friend. M. Lebrun, here, is a man who draws most exactly."—"Yes," said Percerin; "I have seen his pictures, and observed that the dresses were highly elaborated. That is why I at once agreed to make him a costume,—whether one to agree with those of the Epicureans, or an original one."—"My dear Monsieur, we accept your offer, and shall presently avail ourselves of it; but just now M. Lebrun is not in want of the dresses you will make for himself, but of those you are making for the king."

Percerin made a bound backwards, which D'Artagnan, calmest and most appreciative of men, did not consider overdone,—so many strange and startling aspects wore the proposal which Aramis had just hazarded. "The king's dresses! Give the king's dresses to any mortal whatever! Oh, for once, Monseigneur, your Grace is mad!" cried the poor tailor, in extremity.

"Help me now, D'Artagnan," said Aramis, more and more calm and smiling. "Help me now to persuade Monsieur; for *you* understand, do you not?"—"Eh! eh!—not exactly, I declare."—"What! you do not understand that M. Fouquet wishes to afford the king the surprise of finding his portrait on his arrival at Vaux; and that the portrait, which will be a striking resemblance, ought to be dressed exactly as the king will be on the day it is shown?"—"Oh, yes, yes!" said the musketeer, nearly convinced, so plausible was this reasoning. "Yes, my dear Aramis, you are right; it is a happy idea. I will wager it is one of your own, Aramis."

"Well, I don't know," replied the bishop; "either mine or M. Fouquet's." Then scanning Percerin, after noticing D'Artagnan's hesitation, "Well, M. Percerin," he asked, "what do you say to this?"—"I say that—"—"That you are, doubtless, free to refuse. I know well,—and I by no means count upon compelling you, my dear Monsieur. I will say more; I even understand all the delicacy you feel in taking up with M.

Fouquet's idea,—you dread appearing to flatter the king. A noble spirit, M. Percerin, a noble spirit!" The tailor stammered. "It would indeed be a very pretty compliment to pay the young prince," continued Aramis; "but as the superintendent told me, 'If Percerin refuse, tell him that it will not at all lower him in my opinion, and I shall always esteem him; only—'"—"Only?" repeated Percerin, rather troubled.—"'Only,'" continued Aramis, "'I shall be compelled to say to the king,'—you understand, my dear M. Percerin, that these are M. Fouquet's words,—'I shall be constrained to say to the king, "Sire, I had intended to present your Majesty with your portrait; but owing to a feeling of delicacy, exaggerated perhaps, but creditable, M. Percerin opposed the project."'"

"Opposed!" cried the tailor, terrified at the responsibility which would weigh upon him; "I to oppose the desire, the will of M. Fouquet when he is seeking to please the king! Oh, what a hateful word you have uttered, Monseigneur! Oppose! Oh, 'tis not I who said it, thank God! I call the captain of the musketeers to witness it! Is it not true, M. d'Artagnan, that I have opposed nothing?"

D'Artagnan made a sign indicating that he wished to remain neutral. He felt that there was an intrigue at the bottom of it, whether comedy or tragedy; he was disgusted at not being able to fathom it, but in the meanwhile wished to keep clear. But already Percerin, goaded by the idea that the king should be told he had stood in the way of a pleasant surprise, had offered Lebrun a chair, and proceeded to bring from a wardrobe four magnificent dresses, the fifth being still in the workmen's hands; and these masterpieces he successively fitted upon four lay figures, which imported into France in the time of Concini had been given to Percerin II. by Maréchal d'Ancre after the discomfiture of the Italian tailors ruined in their competition. The painter set to work to draw and then to paint the dresses. But Aramis, who was closely watching all the phases of his toil, suddenly stopped him.

"I think you have not quite got it, my dear Lebrun," he said; "your colours will deceive you, and on canvas we shall lack that exact resemblance which is absolutely requisite. Time is necessary for attentively observing the finer shades."—"Quite true," said Percerin; "but time is wanting, and on that head you will agree with me, Monseigneur, I can do nothing."—"Then the affair will fail," said Aramis, quietly, "and that because of a want of precision in the colours."

Digitized by Google

Nevertheless, Lebrun went on copying the materials and ornaments with the closest fidelity,—a process which Aramis watched with ill-concealed impatience. "What in the devil, now, is the meaning of this imbroglio?" the musketeer kept saying to himself.—"That will certainly never do," said Aramis. "M. Lebrun, close your box, and roll up your canvas."—"But, Monsieur," cried the vexed painter, "the light is abominable here."

"An idea, M. Lebrun, an idea! If we had a sample of the materials, for example, and with time and a better light—"—"Oh, then," cried Lebrun, "I would answer for the effect!"—"Good!" said D'Artagnan, "this ought to be the knot of the whole thing; they want a sample of each of the materials. *Mordioux!* will this Percerin give it now?" Percerin, beaten in his last retreat, and duped moreover by the feigned good-nature of Aramis, cut out five samples and handed them to the Bishop of Vannes.

"I like this better. That is your opinion, is it not?" said Aramis to D'Artagnan.—"My dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "my opinion is that you are always the same."—"And, consequently, always your friend," said the bishop, in a charming tone.

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan, aloud; then, in a low voice, "If I am your dupe, double Jesuit that you are, I will not be your accomplice; and to prevent it, 'tis time I left this place. Adieu, Aramis," he added, aloud, "adieu; I am going to rejoin Porthos."—"Then wait for me," said Aramis, pocketing the samples; "for I have done, and shall not be sorry to say a parting word to our friend." Lebrun packed up, Percerin put back the dresses into the closet, Aramis put his hand on his pocket to assure himself that the samples were secure, and they all left the study.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXI

WHERE, PROBABLY, MOLIERE FORMED HIS FIRST IDEA OF THE "BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME"

D'ARTAGNAN found Porthos in the adjoining chamber; but no longer an irritated Porthos, or a disappointed Porthos, but Porthos radiant, blooming, fascinating, and chatting with Molière, who was looking upon him with a species of idolatry, and as a man would who had not only never seen anything better, but not even ever anything so good. Aramis went straight up to Porthos and offered him his delicate white hand, which lost itself in the gigantic hand of his old friend,—an operation which Aramis never hazarded without a certain uneasiness. But the friendly pressure having been performed not too painfully for him, the Bishop of Vannes passed over to Molière. "Well, Monsieur," said he, "will you come with me to St. Mandé?"—"I will go anywhere you like, Monseigneur," answered Molière.

"To St. Mandé!" cried Porthos, surprised at seeing the proud bishop of Vannes fraternising with a journeyman tailor. "What! Aramis, are you going to take this gentleman to St. Mandé?"—"Yes," said Aramis, smiling; "our work is pressing."—"Besides, my dear Porthos," continued D'Artagnan, "M. Molière is not altogether what he seems."—"In what way?" asked Porthos.—"Why, this gentleman is one of M. Percerin's chief clerks, and he is expected at St. Mandé to try on the dresses which M. Fouquet has ordered for the Epicureans."—"'Tis precisely so," said Molière; "yes, Monsieur."

"Come, then, my dear M. Molière," said Aramis; "that is, if you have done with M. du Vallon?"—"We have finished," replied Porthos.—"And you are satisfied?" asked D'Artagnan.—"Completely so," replied Porthos.

Molière took his leave of Porthos with much ceremony, and grasped the hand which the captain of the musketeers furtively offered him. "Pray, Monsieur," concluded Porthos, mincingly, "above all, be exact."—"You will have your dress after to-morrow, Monsieur the Baron," answered Molière; and he left with Aramis.

D'Artagnan, taking Porthos's arm, inquired, "What has this tailor done for you, my dear Porthos, that you are so pleased

with him?"—"What has he done for me, my friend,—done for me!" cried Porthos, enthusiastically.—"Yes, I ask you, what has he done for you?"—"My friend, he has done that which no tailor ever yet accomplished,—he has taken my measure without touching me!"

"Ah, bah! tell me how he did it!"—"First, then, they went, I don't know where, for a number of lay figures, of all heights and sizes, hoping there would be one to suit mine; but the largest—that of the drum-major of the Swiss Guard—was two inches too short, and half a foot too slender."—"Indeed!"—"It is exactly as I tell you, D'Artagnan; but he is a great man, or at the very least a great tailor, is this M. Molière. He was not at all put at fault by the circumstance."

"What did he do, then?"—"Oh, it is a very simple matter! I' faith, 'tis an unheard-of thing that people should have been so stupid as not to have discovered this method from the first. What annoyance and humiliation they would have spared me!"—"Not to speak of the dresses, my dear Porthos."—"Yes, thirty dresses."—"Well, my dear Porthos, tell me M. Molière's plan."

"Molière? You call him so, do you? I shall make a point of recollecting his name."—"Yes; or Poquelin, if you prefer that."—"No; I like Molière best. When I wish to recollect his name, I shall think of *volière* [an aviary]; and as I have one at Pierrefonds—"—"Capital!" returned D'Artagnan; "and M. Molière's plan?"

"'Tis this: instead of pulling me to pieces, as all these rascals do, making me bend in my back, and double my joints,—all of them low and dishonourable practices—" D'Artagnan made a sign of approbation with his head. "'Monsieur,' he said to me," continued Porthos, "'a gentleman ought to measure himself. Do me the pleasure to draw near this glass;' and I drew near the glass. I must own I did not exactly understand what this good M. Volière wanted with me—"—"Molière."—"Ah, yes; Molière, Molière. And as the fear of being measured still possessed me, 'Take care,' said I to him, 'what you are going to do with me; I am very ticklish, I warn you!' But he, with his soft voice (for he is a courteous fellow, we must admit, my friend),—he, with his soft voice, said: 'Monsieur, that your dress may fit you well, it must be made according to your figure. Your figure is exactly reflected in this mirror. We shall take the measure of this reflection.'"

"In fact," said D'Artagnan, "you saw yourself in the glass;

Digitized by Google

but where did they find one in which you could see your whole figure?"—"My good friend, it is the very glass in which the king sees himself."—"Yes; but the king is a foot and a half shorter than you are."

"Ah! well, I know not how that may be,—it would no doubt be a way of flattering the king,—but the looking-glass was too large for me. 'Tis true that its height was made up of three Venetian plates of glass, placed one above another, and its breadth of the three similar pieces in juxtaposition."—"Oh, Porthos, what excellent words you have at your command! Where in the world did you make the collection?"—"At Belle-Isle. Aramis explained them to the architect."

"Ah, very good! Let us return to the glass, my friend."—"Then this good M. Volière—"—"Molière."—"Yes, Molière,—you are right. You will see now, my dear friend, that I shall recollect his name too well. This excellent M. Molière set to work tracing out lines on the mirror with a piece of Spanish chalk, following throughout the shape of my arms and my shoulders, all the while expounding this maxim, which I thought admirable,—'It is necessary that a dress should not incommode its wearer.'"

"In reality," said D'Artagnan, "that is an excellent maxim, which is, unfortunately, seldom carried out in practice."—"That is why I found it all the more astonishing when he expatiated upon it."—"Ah! he expatiated?"—"*Parbleu!*"—"Let me hear his theory."

"'Seeing that,' he continued, 'one may in awkward circumstances or in a troublesome position have one's doublet on one's shoulder, and not desire to take it off—'"—"True," said D'Artagnan.—"'And so,' continued M. Volière—"—"Molière."—"Molière; yes. 'And so,' went on M. Molière, 'you want to draw your sword, Monsieur, and you have your doublet on your back. What do you do?' 'I take it off,' I answered. 'Well, no,' he replied. 'How "no"?' 'I say that the dress should be so well made that it can in no way encumber you, even in drawing your sword.' 'Ah, ah! Put yourself on guard!' pursued he. I did it with such wondrous firmness that two panes of glass burst out of the window. ''Tis nothing, nothing,' said he; 'keep your position.' I raised my left arm in the air, the fore-arm gracefully bent, the ruffle drooping, and my wrist curbed, while my right arm, half extended, securely covered my waist with the elbow, and my breast with the wrist."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "'tis the true guard,—the academic

guard."—"You have said the very word, dear friend. In the meanwhile Volière—"—"Molière."—"Hold! I should certainly, after all, prefer to call him— What did you say his other name was?"—"Poquelin."—"I prefer to call him Poquelin."

"And how will you remember this name better than the other?"—"You understand— He calls himself Poquelin, does he not?"—"Yes."—"I shall recall to mind Madame Coquenard."—"Good!"—"I shall change *Coq* into *Poq*, *nard* into *lin*; and instead of *Coquenard* I shall have *Poquelin*."—"'Tis wonderful!" cried D'Artagnan, astounded. "Go on, my friend! I am listening to you with admiration."

"This Coquelin sketched my arm on the glass—"—"I beg your pardon,—Poquelin."—"What did I say, then?"—"You said 'Coquelin.'"—"Ah, true! This Poquelin, then, sketched my arm on the glass; but he took his time over it,—he kept looking at me a good deal. The fact is, that I was very handsome. 'Does it weary you?' he asked. 'A little,' I replied, bending a little in my hands; 'but I could yet hold out an hour.' 'No, no; I will not allow it. We have here some willing fellows who will make it a duty to support your arms, as, of old, men supported those of the prophet.' 'Very good,' I answered. 'That will not be humiliating to you?' 'My friend," said I, 'there is, I think, a great difference between being supported and being measured.'"

"The distinction is full of sense," interrupted the captain.—"Then," continued Porthos, "he made a sign. Two lads approached: one supported my left arm; while the other, with infinite address, supported my right arm. 'Another man!' cried he. A third approached. 'Support Monsieur by the waist,' said he. The *garçon* complied."—"So that you were at rest?" asked D'Artagnan.—"Perfectly; and Poquenard drew me on the glass."

"Poquelin, my friend."—"Poquelin,—you are right. Stay! decidedly I prefer calling him Volière."—"Yes; and then it was over, wasn't it?"—"During that time Volière drew me on the mirror."—"'Twas delicate in him."—"I much like the plan: it is respectful, and keeps every one in his place."

"And there it ended?"—"Without a soul having touched me, my friend."—"Except the three *garçons* who supported you."—"Doubtless; but I have, I think, already explained to you the difference there is between supporting and measuring."—"'Tis true," answered D'Artagnan, who said afterwards to

Digitized by Google

himself, "I' faith, I greatly deceive myself, or I have been the means of a good windfall to that rascal Molière, and we shall assuredly see the scene hit off to the life in some comedy or other."

Porthos smiled. "What are you laughing at?" asked D'Artagnan.—"Must I confess it? Well, I was laughing over my good fortune."—"Oh, that is true; I don't know a happier man than you. But what is this last piece of luck that has befallen you?"—"Well, my dear fellow, congratulate me."—"I desire nothing better."—"It seems I am the first who has had his measure taken in that manner."

"Are you sure of it?"—"Nearly so. Certain signs of intelligence which passed between Volière and the other *garçons* showed me the fact."—"Well, my friend, that does not surprise me from Molière," said D'Artagnan.—"Volière, my friend."—"Oh, no, no, indeed! I am very willing to leave you, to say Volière; but I myself shall continue to say Molière. Well, this, I was saying, does not surprise me, coming from Molière, who is a very ingenious fellow, and whom you inspired with this grand idea."

"It will be of great use to him by and by, I am sure."—"Won't it be of use to him, indeed! I believe you, it will, and not a little so; for you see my friend Molière is of all known tailors the man who best clothes our barons, counts, and marquises—according to their measure." On this observation, neither the application nor the depth of which shall we discuss, D'Artagnan and Porthos quitted M. Percerin's house and rejoined their carriage, wherein we will leave them in order to look after Molière and Aramis at St. Mandé.

CHAPTER CCXII

THE BEEHIVE, THE BEES, AND THE HONEY

THE Bishop of Vannes, much annoyed at having met D'Artagnan at M. Percerin's, returned to St. Mandé in no very good humour. Molière, on the other hand, quite delighted at having made such a capital rough sketch, and at knowing where to find its original again whenever he should desire to convert his sketch into a picture, arrived in the merriest of moods. All the first story of the left wing was occupied by the most celebrated

Digitized by Google

Epicureans in Paris, and those on the freest footing in the house,—every one in his compartment, like the bees in their cells, employed in producing the honey intended for that royal cake which M. Fouquet proposed to offer his Majesty Louis XIV. during the *fête* at Vaux. Pellisson, his head leaning on his hand, was engaged in drawing out the plan of the prologue to "Les Fâcheux," a comedy in three acts, which was to be put on the stage by Poquelin de Molière, as D'Artagnan called him, or Coquelin de Volière, as Porthos styled him. Loret, with all the charming innocence of a journalist,—the journalists of all ages have always been so artless!—Loret was composing an account of the *fêtes* of Vaux, before those *fêtes* had taken place. La Fontaine sauntered about among them,—a wandering, absent-minded, boring, unbearable shade, buzzing and humming at everybody's shoulder a thousand poetic inanities. He so often disturbed Pellisson, that the latter, raising his head, crossly said, "At least, La Fontaine, supply me with a rhyme, since you say you have the run of the gardens at Parnassus."—"What rhyme do you want?" asked the *Fabler*, as Madame de Sévigné used to call him.

"I want a rhyme to *lumière*."—"*Ornière*," answered La Fontaine.—"Ah, but my good friend, one cannot talk of *wheel-ruts* when celebrating the delights of Vaux," said Loret.—"Besides, it doesn't rhyme," answered Pellisson.—"How! doesn't rhyme?" cried La Fontaine, in surprise.

"Yes; you have an abominable habit, my friend,—a habit which will ever prevent your becoming a poet of the first order. You rhyme in a slovenly manner."—"Oh! oh! you think so, do you, Pellisson?"—"Yes, I do, indeed. Remember that a rhyme is never good so long as one can find a better."—"Then I will never write anything again but in prose," said La Fontaine, who had taken up Pellisson's reproach in earnest. "Ah, I often suspected I was nothing but a rascally poet! Yes, 'tis the very truth."

"Do not say so; your remark is too sweeping, and there is much that is good in your *Fables*."—"And to begin," continued La Fontaine, following up his idea, "I will go and burn a hundred verses I have just made."—"Where are your verses?"—"In my head."—"Well, if they are in your head you cannot burn them."—"True," said La Fontaine; "but if I do not burn them—"—"Well, what will happen if you do not burn them?"—"They will remain in my mind, and I shall never forget them."

Digitized by Google

"The devil!" cried Loret; "what a dangerous thing! One would go mad with it!"—"The devil, devil, devil!" repeated La Fontaine; "what can I do?"—"I have discovered the way," said Molière, who had entered during the last words of the conversation.—"What way?"—"Write them first and burn them afterwards."—"How simple it is! Well, I should never have discovered that. What a mind that devil Molière has!" said La Fontaine. Then, striking his forehead, "Oh, thou wilt never be aught but an ass, Jean la Fontaine!" he added.

"What are you saying there, my friend?" broke in Molière, approaching the poet, whose aside he had heard.—"I say I shall never be aught but an ass," answered La Fontaine, with a heavy sigh and swimming eyes. "Yes, my friend," he added, with increasing grief, "it seems that I rhyme in a slovenly manner."—"That is wrong."—"You see! I am a puppy!"—"Who said so?"—"*Parbleu!* 'twas Pellisson; did you not, Pellisson?"

Pellisson, again lost in his work, took good care not to answer. "But if Pellisson said you were a puppy," cried Molière, "Pellisson has gravely insulted you."—"Do you think so?"—"Ah! I advise you, as you are a gentleman, not to leave an insult like that unpunished."—"Oh!" exclaimed La Fontaine.—"Did you ever fight?"—"Once only, with a lieutenant in the light horse."—"What wrong had he done you?"—"It seems he was my wife's lover."

"Ah! ah!" said Molière, becoming slightly pale; but as at La Fontaine's declaration the others had turned round, Molière kept upon his lips the rallying smile which had so nearly died away, and continued to make La Fontaine speak,—"and what was the result of the duel?"—"The result was, that on the ground my opponent disarmed me, and then made an apology, promising never again to set foot in my house."

"And you considered yourself satisfied?" said Molière.—"Not at all! on the contrary, I picked up my sword. 'I beg your pardon, Monsieur,' I said; 'I have not fought you because you were my wife's lover, but because I was told I ought to fight. Now, since I have never known any peace save since you made her acquaintance, do me the pleasure to continue your visits as heretofore, or, *morbleu!* let us set to again.' And so," continued La Fontaine, "he was compelled to resume his relations with Madame, and I continue to be the happiest of husbands."

All burst out laughing. Molière alone passed his hand across

his eyes. Why? Perhaps to wipe away a tear, perhaps to smother a sigh. Alas! we know that Molière was a moralist, but he was not a philosopher. "It is all the same," he said, returning to the topic of the conversation, "Pellisson has insulted you."—"Ah, truly! I had already forgotten it."—"And I am going to challenge him on your behalf."—"Well, you can do so, if you think it indispensable."—"I do think it indispensable, and I am going—"

"Stay!" exclaimed La Fontaine; "I want your advice."—"Upon what?—this insult?"—"No; tell me really now whether *lumière* does not rhyme with *ornière*."—"I should make them rhyme."—"Ah! I knew you would."—"And I have made a hundred thousand such rhymes in my time."—"A hundred thousand!" cried La Fontaine; "four times as many as in 'La Pucelle,' which M. Chapelain is meditating. Is it also on this subject that you have composed a hundred thousand verses?"

"Listen to me, you eternally absent-minded creature!" said Molière.—"It is certain," continued La Fontaine, "that *légume*, for instance, rhymes with *posthume*."—"In the plural, especially."—"Yes, especially in the plural, seeing that then it rhymes not with three letters, but with four; as *ornière* does with *lumière*. Put *ornières* and *lumières* in the plural, my dear Pellisson," said La Fontaine, clapping his hand on the shoulder of his friend, whose insult he had quite forgotten, "and they will rhyme."—"Hem!" cried Pellisson.

"Molière says so, and Molière is a judge of it; he declares he has himself made a hundred thousand verses."—"Come," said Molière, laughing, "he is off now."—"It is like *rivage*, which rhymes admirably with *herbage;* I would take my oath of it."—"But—" said Molière.—"I tell you all this," continued La Fontaine, "because you are preparing an entertainment for Vaux, are you not?"—"Yes,—'Les Fâcheux.'"

"Ah, yes,—'Les Fâcheux;' yes, I recollect. Well, I was thinking a prologue would admirably suit your entertainment."—"Doubtless it would suit capitally."—"Ah! you are of my opinion?"—"So much so, that I asked you to write this prologue."—"You asked me to write it?"—"Yes, you; and on your refusal begged you to ask Pellisson, who is engaged upon it at this moment."

"Ah! that is what Pellisson is doing, then? I' faith, my dear Molière, you speak with very good sense sometimes."—"When?"—"When you call me absent-minded. It is a

wretched defect. I will cure myself of it, and I am going to write your prologue for you."—"But seeing that Pellisson is about it—"—"Ah, true! Double rascal that I am! Loret was indeed right in saying I was a puppy."

"It was not Loret who said so, my friend."—"Well, then, whoever said so, 'tis the same to me! And so your entertainment is called 'Les Fâcheux?' Well, can you not make *heureux* rhyme with *fâcheux?*"—"If obliged, yes."—"And even with *capricieux.*"—"Oh, no, no!"—"It would be hazardous, and yet why so?"—"There is too great a difference in the cadences."

"I was fancying," said La Fontaine, leaving Molière for Loret,—"I was fancying—"—"What were you fancying?" said Loret, in the middle of a sentence. "Make haste!"—"You are writing the prologue to 'Les Fâcheux,' are you not?"—"No, *mordieu!* it is Pellisson."—"Ah, Pellisson!" cried La Fontaine, going over to him. "I was fancying," he continued, "that the nymph of Vaux—"

"Ah, beautiful!" cried Loret. "The nymph of Vaux! Thank you, La Fontaine; you have just given me the two concluding verses of my paper,—

Et l'on vit la nymphe de Vaux
Donner le prix à leurs travaux."

"Good! That is something like a rhyme," said Pellisson. "If you could rhyme like that, La Fontaine—"—"But it seems I do rhyme like that, since Loret says it is I who gave him the two lines he has just read."

"Well, if you can rhyme so well, La Fontaine," said Pellisson, "tell me now in what way you would begin my prologue?"—"I should say for instance, *O nymphe—qui—* After *qui* I should place a verb in the second person plural of the present indicative, and should go on thus: *cette grotte profonde.*"—"But the verb, the verb?" asked Pellisson.—"*Pour venir admirer le plus grand roi du monde,*" continued La Fontaine.

"But the verb, the verb?" obstinately insisted Pellisson. "This second person plural of the present indicative?"—"Well, then; *quittez,*—

O nymphe qui quittez cette grotte profonde
Pour venir admirer le plus grand roi du monde."

"You would put *qui quittez,* would you?"—"Why not?"—"*Qui—qui!*"—"Ah, my dear fellow," exclaimed La Fontaine, "you are a shocking pedant!"

Digitized by Google

"Without counting," said Molière, "that in the second verse *venir admirer* is very weak, my dear La Fontaine."—"Then you see clearly that I am nothing but a poor creature,—a puppy, as you said."—"I never said so."—"Then, as Loret said."—"And it was not Loret, either; it was Pellisson."—"Well, Pellisson was right a hundred times over. But what annoys me more than anything, my dear Molière, is that I fear we shall not have our Epicurean dresses."

"You expected yours, then, for the *fête?*"—"Yes, for the *fête*, and then for after the *fête*. My housekeeper told me that my own is rather faded."—"The devil! your housekeeper is right,—rather more than faded!"—"Ah, you see," resumed La Fontaine; "the fact is, I left it on the floor in my room, and my cat—"—"Well, your cat—"—"She kittened upon it, which has rather altered its colour."

Molière burst out laughing; Pellisson and Loret followed his example. At this juncture the Bishop of Vannes appeared, with a roll of plans and parchments under his arm. As if the angel of death had chilled all gay and sprightly fancies, as if that wan form had scared away the Graces to whom Xenocrates sacrificed, silence immediately reigned through the study, and every one resumed his self-possession and his pen.

Aramis distributed the notes of invitation, and thanked them in the name of M. Fouquet. "The superintendent," he said, "being kept to his room by business, could not come to see them, but begged them to send him some of the fruits of their day's work, to enable him to forget the fatigue of his labour in the night." At these words, all settled to work. La Fontaine placed himself at a table, and set his rapid pen running over the vellum; Pellisson made a fair copy of his prologue; Molière gave fifty fresh verses, with which his visit to Percerin had inspired him; Loret, his article on the marvellous *fêtes* he predicted; and Aramis, laden with booty like the king of the bees,—that great black drone, decked with purple and gold,—re-entered his apartment, silent and busy. But before departing, "Remember, gentlemen," said he, "we all leave to-morrow evening."

"In that case I must give notice at home," said Molière.—"Yes; poor Molière!" said Loret, smiling,—"he loves his home."—"'*He* loves,' yes," replied Molière, with his sad, sweet smile. "'He loves,'—that does not mean, they love *him*."—"As for me," said La Fontaine, "they love me at Château Thierry, I am very sure."

Digitized by Google

Aramis here re-entered, after a brief disappearance. "Will any one go with me?" he asked. "I am going by way of Paris, after having passed a quarter of an hour with M. Fouquet. I offer my carriage."—"Good!" said Molière. "I accept it; I am in a hurry."—"I shall dine here," said Loret. "M. de Gourville has promised me some crawfish,—

Il m'a promis des écrevisses—

Find a rhyme for that, La Fontaine."

Aramis went out laughing, as only he could laugh, and Molière followed him. They were at the bottom of the stairs, when La Fontaine opened the door and shouted out,—

"Moyennant que tu l'écrivisses,
Il t'a promis des écrevisses."

The shouts of laughter reached the ears of Fouquet at the moment Aramis opened the door of the study. As to Molière, he had undertaken to order the horses, while Aramis went to exchange a parting word with the superintendent. "Oh, how they are laughing there!" said Fouquet, with a sigh.—"And do you not laugh, Monseigneur?"—"I laugh no longer now, M. d'Herblay. The *fête* is approaching; money is departing."—"Have I not told you that was my business?"—"Yes; you promised me millions."—"You shall have them the day after the king's *entrée* into Vaux."

Fouquet looked closely at Aramis, and passed his icy hand across his moistened brow. Aramis perceived that the superintendent either doubted him, or felt that he was powerless to obtain the money. How could Fouquet suppose that a poor bishop, ex-abbé, ex-musketeer, could procure it? "Why doubt me?" said Aramis. Fouquet smiled and shook his head. "Man of little faith!" added the bishop.

"My dear M. d'Herblay," answered Fouquet, "if I fall—"—"Well, if you 'fall'—"—"I shall at least fall from such a height that I shall shatter myself in falling." Then giving himself a shake, as though to escape from himself, "Whence come you," said he, "my friend?"—"From Paris,—from Percerin."

"And what have you been doing at Percerin's,—for I suppose you attach no great importance to our poets' dresses?"—"No; I went to prepare a surprise."—"Surprise?"—"Yes; which you are to give to the king."—"And it will cost much?"—"Oh, a hundred pistoles you will give Lebrun!"

"A painting? Ah, all the better! And what is this painting to represent?"—"I will tell you. Then at the same time,

whatever you may say of it, I went to see the dresses for our poets."—" Bah! and they will be rich and elegant? "—" Splendid! There will be few great monseigneurs with dresses so good. People will see the difference between the courtiers of wealth and those of friendship."—" Ever generous and graceful, dear prelate! "—" In your school."

Fouquet grasped his hand. " And where are you going? " he said.—" I am off to Paris, when you shall have given me a certain letter."—" For whom? "—" M. de Lyonne."—" And what do you want with Lyonne? "—" I wish to make him sign a *lettre de cachet.*"—" *Lettre de cachet!* Do you desire to put somebody in the Bastille? "—" On the contrary,—to let somebody out."

" And who? "—" A poor devil,—a youth, a lad who has been imprisoned these ten years for two Latin verses he made against the Jesuits."—" 'Two Latin verses!' and for 'two Latin verses' the miserable being has been in prison for ten years? "—" Yes."—" And has committed no other crime? "—" Beyond this, he is as innocent as you or I."—" On your word? "—" On my honour! "—" And his name is—"—" Seldon."

" Oh, that is too cruel! You knew this, and you never told me! "—" 'Twas only yesterday his mother applied to me, Monseigneur."—" And the woman is poor? "—" In the deepest misery."—" Oh, God! " said Fouquet, " thou dost sometimes bear with such injustice on earth that I understand why there are wretches who doubt thy existence! Stay, M. d'Herblay! " and Fouquet, taking a pen, wrote a few rapid lines to his colleague Lyonne.

Aramis took the letter, and made ready to go. " Wait! " said Fouquet. He opened his drawer, and took out ten government notes which were there, each for a thousand livres. " Stay! " he said. " Set the son at liberty, and give this to the mother; but, above all, tell her not—"—" What, Monseigneur? "—" That she is ten thousand livres richer than I. She would say I am a poor superintendent! Go; and I hope that God will bless those who are mindful of his poor! "—" So also do I hope," replied Aramis, kissing Fouquet's hand. And he went out quickly, carrying off the letter for Lyonne and the notes for Seldon's mother, and taking up Molière, who was beginning to lose patience.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXIII

ANOTHER SUPPER AT THE BASTILLE

SEVEN o'clock sounded from the great clock of the Basti… that famous clock which, like all the accessories of the St… prison, the very use of which is a torture, brought to the prisoners' notice the lapse of every hour of their suffering. The timepiece of the Bastille, adorned with figures, like most of the clocks of the period, represented Saint Peter in bonds. It was the supper hour of the unfortunate captives. The doors, grating on their enormous hinges, opened for the passage of the baskets and trays of provisions, the delicacy of which, as M. de Baisemeaux has himself taught us, was regulated by the condition in life of the prisoner. We understand on this head the theories of M. de Baisemeaux, sovereign dispenser of gastronomic delicacies, head cook of the royal fortress, whose trays, full laden, were ascending the steep staircases, carrying some consolation to the prisoners in the bottom of honestly filled bottles. This same hour was that of the governor's supper also. He had a guest to-day, and the spit turned more heavily than usual. Roast partridges flanked with quails and flanking a larded leveret; boiled fowls; ham, fried and sprinkled with white wine; *cardons* of Guipuzcoa and *la bisque d'écrevisses*,—these, together with the soups and *hors d'œuvres*, constituted the governor's bill of fare.

Baisemeaux, seated at table, was rubbing his hands and looking at the Bishop of Vannes, who, booted like a cavalier, dressed in grey, with a sword at his side, kept talking of his hunger and testifying the liveliest impatience. M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun was not accustomed to the unbending movement of his greatness my Lord of Vannes; and this evening Aramis, becoming quite sprightly, volunteered confidence on confidence. The prelate had again a little touch of the musketeer about him. The bishop just trenched on the borders only of licence in his style of conversation. As for M. de Baisemeaux, with the facility of vulgar people, he gave himself loose rein, on this touch of *abandon* on the part of his guest. "Monsieur," said he,—"for indeed to-night I don't like to call you Monseigneur—"—"By no means," said Aramis; "call me Monsieur,—I am booted."

Digitized by Google

"Do you know, Monsieur, of whom you sign the signature
evening?"—"No! faith," said Aramis, taking up heless, 'tis
but I hope I remind you of a good companion." *tête-à-tête*
mind me of two, Monsieur. François, shut the windo I forgot
ind may annoy his greatness."—"And let him go," ak to a
Aramis. "The supper is completely served, and we shall eat
t very well without waiters. I like extremely to be *tête-à-tête*
when I am with a friend." Baisemeaux bowed respectfully.
"I like extremely," continued Aramis, "to help myself."

"Retire, François!" cried Baisemeaux. "I was saying that your Greatness puts me in mind of two persons,—one very illustrious, the late cardinal, the great cardinal of La Rochelle, who wore boots like you."—"Indeed," said Aramis; "and the other?"—"The other was a certain musketeer, very handsome, very brave, very adventurous, very fortunate, who from being abbé turned musketeer, and from musketeer turned abbé." Aramis condescended to smile. "From abbé," continued Baisemeaux, encouraged by Aramis's smile,—"from abbé, bishop, and from bishop—"—"Ah, stay there, I beg!" exclaimed Aramis.—"I say, Monsieur, that you give me the idea of a cardinal."

"Enough, dear M. Baisemeaux! As you said, I have on the boots of a cavalier; but I do not intend, for all that, to embroil myself with the church this evening."—"You have wicked intentions, however, Monseigneur."—"Oh, yes; wicked I own, as everything mundane is."—"You traverse the town and the streets in disguise?"—"In disguise, as you say."—"And do you still make use of your sword?"—"Yes, I should think so; but only when I am compelled. Do me the pleasure to summon François."

"Have you no wine there?"—"'Tis not for wine, but because it is hot here and the window is shut."—"I shut the windows at supper-time so as not to hear the sounds or the arrival of couriers."—"Ah, yes! You hear them when the window is open?"—"But too well, and that disturbs me. You understand!"—"Nevertheless, I am suffocated. François!" François entered. "Open the windows, I pray you, François! You will allow him, dear M. Baisemeaux?"—"You are at home here," answered the governor. The window was opened.

"Do you not think," said M. de Baisemeaux, "that you will find yourself very lonely, now that M. de la Fère has returned to his household gods at Blois? He is a very old friend, is he not?"—"You know it as I do, Baisemeaux, seeing that you

sketeers with us."—"Bah! with my friends I
ther bottles nor years."—"And you are right. But
e than love M. de la Fère, dear Baise meaux; I venerate
"Well, for my part, though 'tis sin gular," said the
or, "I prefer M. d'Artagnan to the cou mt. There is a
man for you, who drinks long and well! That kind of people
allow you at least to penetrate their thoughts."

"Baisemeaux, make me tipsy to-night! L of t t us have a
debauch as of old; and if I have a trouble at the the P bottom of my
heart, I promise you, you shall see it as you would a diamond
at the bottom of your glass."—"Bravo!" said Baisemeaux;
and he poured out a great glass of wine and drank it off at a
draught, trembling with joy at the idea of being, by hook or by
crook, in the secret of some high archiepiscopal misdemeanour.
While he was drinking he did not see with what attention Aramis
was noting the sounds in the great court. A courier arrived
about eight o'clock, as François brought in the fifth bottle;
and although the courier made a great noise, Baisemeaux
heard nothing.

"The devil take him!" said Aramis.—"What? who?"
asked Baisemeaux. "I hope 'tis neither the wine you drink
nor he who is the cause of your drinking it."—"No; it is a horse,
who is making noise enough in the court for a whole squadron."
—"Pooh! some courier or other," replied the governor, re-
doubling his numerous bumpers. "Yes, the devil take him,
and so quickly that we shall never hear him speak more!
Hurrah! hurrah!"

"You forget me, Baisemeaux! my glass is empty," said
Aramis, showing his dazzling goblet.—"Upon honour, you
delight me. François, wine!" François entered. "Wine,
fellow! and better."—"Yes, Monsieur, yes; but a courier has
just arrived."—"Let him go to the devil, I say."—"Yes,
Monsieur, but—"—"Let him leave his news at the office; we
will see to it to-morrow. To-morrow,—there will be time to-
morrow; there will be daylight," said Baisemeaux, chanting
the words.

"Ah, Monsieur," grumbled the soldier François, in spite of
himself,—"Monsieur!"—"Take care," said Aramis, "take
care!"—"Of what, dear M. d'Herblay?" said Baisemeaux,
half intoxicated.

"The letter which the courier brings to the governor of a
fortress is sometimes an order."—"Nearly always."—"Do not
orders issue from the ministers?"—"Yes, undoubtedly; but—"

—" And what do these ministers do but countersign the signature of the king? "—" Perhaps you are right. Nevertheless, 'tis very tiresome when you are sitting before a good table, *tête-à-tête* with a friend— Ah! I beg your pardon, Monsieur; I forgot that it is I who invite you to supper, and that I speak to a future cardinal."

" Let us pass over that, dear Baisemeaux, and return to our soldier,—to François."—" Well, and what has François done? "—" He has demurred! "—" He was wrong, then."—" However, he *has* demurred, you see; 'tis because there is something extraordinary in this matter. It is very possible that it was not François who was wrong in demurring, but you, who will be wrong in not listening to him."—" Wrong! I to be wrong before François!—that seems rather hard."—" Pardon me, merely an irregularity. But I thought it my duty to make an observation which I deem important."

" Oh, perhaps you are right! " stammered Baisemeaux. " The king's order is sacred; but as to orders that arrive when one is at supper, I repeat, may the devil—"—" If you had said as much to the great cardinal, eh! my dear Baisemeaux, and if his order had been important—"—" I do it that I may not disturb a bishop. *Morbleu!* Am I not, then, excusable? "

" Do not forget, Baisemeaux, that I have worn the uniform, and am accustomed to see everywhere obedience."—" You wish, then—"—" I wish that you should do your duty, my friend; yes, at least before this soldier."—" 'Tis mathematically true," exclaimed Baisemeaux. François still waited. " Let them send this order of the king up to me," he said, recovering himself. And he added in a low tone: " Do you know what it is? I will tell you; it is something about as interesting as this: ' Beware of fire near the powder-magazine,' or ' Look close after such a one, who is clever at escaping.' Ah! if you only knew, Monseigneur, how many times I have been suddenly awakened from the very sweetest and deepest slumber by messengers arriving at full gallop to tell me, or rather bring me a slip of paper containing these words: ' M. de Baisemeaux, what news? ' 'Tis clear enough that those who waste their time writing such orders have never slept in the Bastille. They would know better the thickness of my walls, the vigilance of my officers, the number of my rounds. But, indeed, what can you expect, Monseigneur? It is their business to write and torment me when I am at rest, and to trouble me when I am happy," added Baisemeaux, bowing to Aramis. " Then let us leave them to

their business."—"And do you do yours," added the bishop, smiling, but with command in his expression notwithstanding.

François re-entered. Baisemeaux took from his hands the minister's order. He slowly undid it, and as slowly read it. Aramis pretended to be drinking, so as to be able to watch his host through the glass. Then, having read it, "What was I just saying?" Baisemeaux exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked the bishop.—"An order of release! There, now; excellent news, indeed, to disturb us!"—"Excellent news for him whom it concerns, you will at least agree, my dear governor!"—"And at eight o'clock in the evening!"—"It is charitable!"—"Oh! charity is all very well; but it is for that fellow who is low-spirited, and not for me who am amusing myself," said Baisemeaux, exasperated.

"Will you lose by him, then? And is the prisoner who is to be set at liberty a high payer?"—"Oh yes, indeed! a miserable, five-livre rat!"—"Let me see it," asked M. d'Herblay. "It is no indiscretion?"—"By no means; read it."

"There is 'Urgent' on the paper; you noticed that, I suppose?"—"Oh, admirable! 'Urgent!'—a man who has been there ten years! It is *urgent* to set him free to-day, this very evening at eight o'clock!—*urgent!*" and Baisemeaux, shrugging his shoulders with an air of supreme disdain, flung the order on the table and began eating again. "They are fond of these dodges," he said, with his mouth full; "they seize a man, some fine day, maintain him for ten years, and write to you, 'Watch this fellow well,' or 'Keep him very strictly.' And then, as soon as you are accustomed to look upon the prisoner as a dangerous man, all of a sudden, without cause or precedent, they write, 'Set him at liberty;' and add to their missive, 'Urgent.' You will own, my Lord, 'tis enough to make one shrug his shoulders!"

"What do you expect? It is they who write," said Aramis, "and it is for you to execute the order."—"Good! good! execute it! Oh, patience! You must not imagine that I am a slave."—"Gracious Heaven! my very good M. Baisemeaux, who ever said so? Your independence is known."—"Thank Heaven!"—"But your good heart also is known."—"Ah, don't speak of it!"—"And your obedience to your superiors. Once a soldier, you see, Baisemeaux, always a soldier."

"And so I shall strictly obey; and to-morrow morning, at daybreak, the prisoner referred to shall be set free."—"To-morrow?"—"At dawn."—"Why not this evening, seeing that

Digitized by Google

the *lettre de cachet* bears, both on the direction and inside, 'Urgent'?"—"Because this evening we are at supper, and our affairs are urgent too!"—"Dear Baisemeaux, booted though I be, I feel myself a priest; and charity has higher claims upon me than hunger and thirst. This unfortunate man has suffered long enough, since you have just told me that he has been your prisoner these ten years. Abridge his suffering. His good time has come; give him the benefit quickly. God will repay you in Paradise with years of felicity."

"You wish it?"—"I entreat you."—"What! in the very middle of our repast?"—"I implore you; such an action is worth ten Benedicites."—"It shall be as you desire; only, our supper will get cold."—"Oh, never heed that!"

Baisemeaux leaned back to ring for François, and by a very natural motion turned round towards the door. The order had remained on the table. Aramis seized the opportunity when Baisemeaux was not looking to change the paper for another folded in the same manner, which he took from his pocket. "François," said the governor, "let the major come up here with the turnkeys of the Bertaudière." François bowed and quitted the room, leaving the two companions alone.

CHAPTER CCXIV

THE GENERAL OF THE ORDER

THERE was now a brief silence, during which Aramis never removed his eyes from Baisemeaux for a moment. The latter seemed only half decided to disturb himself thus in the midlde of supper; and it was clear that he was seeking some pretext, whether good or bad, for delay, at any rate till after dessert. And it appeared also that he had hit upon a pretext at last. "Eh! but it is impossible," he cried.—"How impossible?" said Aramis. "Give me a glimpse of this impossibility."—"'Tis impossible to set a prisoner at liberty at such an hour. Where can he go to,—he, who is unacquainted with Paris?"—"He will go wherever he can."

"You see, now, one might as well set a blind man free!"—"I have a carriage, and will take him wherever he wishes."—"You have an answer for everything. François, tell Monsieur the Major to go and open the cell of M. Seldon, No. 3 Bertaudière."

"Seldon!" exclaimed Aramis, very naturally. "You said Seldon, I think?"—"I said Seldon, of course. 'Tis the name of the man to be set free."—"Oh! you mean to say Marchiali?" said Aramis.

"Marchiali? oh, yes, indeed! No, no! Seldon."—"I think you are making a mistake, M. Baisemeaux."—"I have read the order."—"And I also."—"And I saw 'Seldon' in letters as large as that;" and Baisemeaux held up his finger.—"And I read 'Marchiali,' in characters as large as this," said Aramis, holding up two fingers.

"To the proof; let us throw a light on the matter," said Baisemeaux, confident he was right. "There is the paper; you have only to read it."—"I read 'Marchiali,'" returned Aramis, spreading out the paper. "Look!" Baisemeaux looked, and his arms dropped suddenly. "Yes, yes," he said, quite overwhelmed; "yes, Marchiali. 'Tis plainly written 'Marchiali.' Quite true!"—"Ah!"

"How? The man of whom we have talked so much? The man whom they are every day telling me to take such care of?"—"There is 'Marchiali,'" repeated the inflexible Bishop of Vannes.—"I must own it, Monseigneur. But I understand absolutely nothing about it."—"You believe your eyes, at any rate."—"To tell me very plainly there is 'Marchiali.'"—"And in a good handwriting too."

"'Tis a wonder! I still see this order and the name of Seldon, Irishman. I see it. Ah! I even recollect that under this name there was a blot of ink."—"No, there is no ink; no, there is no blot."—"Oh, but there was, though! I know it, because I rubbed the powder that was over the blot."—"In a word, be it how it may, dear M. Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "and whatever you may have seen, the order is signed to release Marchiali, blot or no blot."

"The order is signed to release Marchiali!" repeated Baisemeaux, mechanically endeavouring to regain his courage.—"And you are going to release this prisoner. If your heart dictates to you to deliver Seldon also, I declare to you I will not oppose it the least in the world." Aramis accompanied this remark with a smile, the irony of which effectually dispelled Baisemeaux's confusion of mind and restored his courage.

"Monseigneur," said the governor, "this Marchiali is the very same prisoner whom the other day a priest, confessor of *our order*, came to visit in so imperious and so secret a manner."—"I don't know that, Monsieur," replied the bishop.—"'Tis

no very long time ago, dear M. d'Herblay."—"It is true. But *with us*, Monsieur, it is good that the man of to-day should no longer know what the man of yesterday did."—"In any case," said Baisemeaux, "the visit of the Jesuit confessor must have given happiness to this man."

Aramis made no reply, but recommenced eating and drinking. As for Baisemeaux, no longer touching anything that was on the table, he again took up the order and examined it in every way. This investigation, under ordinary circumstances, would have made the ears of the impatient Aramis burn with anger; but the Bishop of Vannes did not become incensed for so little, especially when he had murmured to himself that to do so was dangerous. "Are you going to release Marchiali?" he said. "What mellow and fragrant sherry this is, my dear governor!"

"Monseigneur," replied Baisemeaux, "I shall release the prisoner Marchiali when I have summoned the courier who brought the order, and above all, when by interrogating him I have satisfied myself."—"The order is sealed, and the courier is ignorant of the contents. What do you want to satisfy yourself about?"—"Be it so, Monseigneur; but I shall send to the ministry, and M. de Lyonne will either confirm or withdraw the order."

"What is the good of all that?" asked Aramis, coldly.—"What good?"—"Yes; what is your object, I ask?"—"The object of never deceiving one's self, Monseigneur, of not failing in the respect which a subaltern owes to his superior officers, nor neglecting the duties of that service which one has voluntarily accepted."—"Very good; you have just spoken so eloquently that I cannot but admire you. It is true that a subaltern owes respect to his superiors; he is guilty when he deceives himself, and he should be punished if he disregard either the duties or laws of his office."

Baisemeaux looked at the bishop with astonishment. "It follows," pursued Aramis, "that you are going to ask advice in order to put your conscience at ease in the matter?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"And if a superior officer gives you orders, you will obey?"—"Never doubt it, Monseigneur."

"You know the king's signature very well, M. de Baisemeaux?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"Is it not on this order of release?"—"It is true, but it may—"—"Be forged, you mean?"—"That is possible, Monseigneur."—"You are right. And that of M. de Lyonne?"—"I see it plain enough on the

order; but just as the king's signature may have been forged, so also, even more likely, may M. de Lyonne's."

"Your logic has the stride of a giant, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and your reasoning is irresistible. But on what special grounds do you base your idea that these signatures are false?"—"On this: the absence of counter-signatures. Nothing checks his Majesty's signature; and M. de Lyonne is not there to tell me he has signed."

"Well, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, bending an eagle glance on the governor, "I adopt so frankly your doubts, and your mode of clearing them up, that I will take a pen, if you will give me one." Baisemeaux gave him a pen. "And a sheet of white paper," added Aramis. Baisemeaux handed some paper. "Now, I—I, also—I, here present—incontestably, I—am going to write an order to which I am certain you will give credence, incredulous as you are!"

Baisemeaux turned pale at this icy assurance of manner. It seemed to him that that voice of Aramis, but just now so playful and so gay, had become funereal and sinister; that the wax-lights had changed into the tapers of a mortuary chapel, and the glasses of wine into chalices of blood. Aramis took a pen and wrote. Baisemeaux, in terror, read over his shoulder.

"A. M. D. G." wrote the bishop; and he drew a cross under these four letters, which signify *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, and thus continued:—"It is our pleasure that the order brought to M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor, for the king, of the castle of the Bastille, be held by him good and effectual, and be immediately carried into operation.

(Signed) "D'HERBLAY,
"*General of the Order, by the grace of God.*"

Baisemeaux was so profoundly astonished that his features remained contracted, his lips parted, and his eyes fixed. He did not move an inch, nor articulate a sound. Nothing could be heard in that large chamber but the buzzing of a little moth which was fluttering about the candles. Aramis, without even deigning to look at the man whom he had reduced to so miserable a condition, drew from his pocket a small case of black wax. He sealed the letter, and stamped it with a seal suspended at his breast, beneath his doublet; and when the operation was concluded, presented—still in silence—the missive to M. de Baisemeaux. The latter, whose hands trembled in a manner

Digitized by Google

to excite pity, turned a dull and meaningless gaze upon the letter. A last gleam of feeling played over his features, and he fell, as if thunderstruck, on a chair.

"Come, come," said Aramis, after a long silence, during which the governor of the Bastille had slowly recovered his senses, "do not lead me to believe, dear Baisemeaux, that the presence of the general of the order is as terrible as that of the Almighty, and that men die merely from seeing him! Take courage, rouse yourself; give me your hand, and obey!"—Baisemeaux, reassured, if not satisfied, obeyed, kissed Aramis's hand, and rose from his chair. "Immediately?" he murmured.

"Oh, there is no pressing haste, my host; take your place again, and do the honours over this beautiful dessert."—"Monseigneur, I shall never recover such a shock as this,—I who have laughed, who have jested with you! I who have dared to treat you on a footing of equality!"—"Say nothing about it, old comrade," replied the bishop, who perceived how strained the cord was, and how dangerous it might be to break it; "say nothing about it. Let us each live in our own way: to you, my protection and my friendship; to me, your obedience. Exactly fulfilling these two requirements, let us live happily."

Baisemeaux reflected. He perceived, at a glance, the consequences of this withdrawal of a prisoner by means of a forged order; and putting in the scale the guarantee offered him by the official order of the general, did not consider it of any value.

Aramis divined this. "My dear Baisemeaux," said he, "you are a simpleton! Lose this habit of reflection when I give myself the trouble to think for you." At another gesture made by Aramis, Baisemeaux bowed again. "How shall I set about it?"—"What is the process for releasing a prisoner?"—"I have the regulations."—"Well, then, follow the regulations, my friend."

"I go with my major to the prisoner's room, and conduct him, if he is a personage of importance."—"But this Marchiali is not an important personage," said Aramis, carelessly.—"I don't know," answered the governor; as if he would have said, "It is for you to instruct me."—"Then, if you don't know it, I am right; so act towards Marchiali as you act towards one of obscure station."

"Good; the regulations so provide. They are to the effect that the turnkey, or one of the lower officials, shall bring the prisoner before the governor, in the office."—"Well, 'tis very wise, that; and then?"—"Then we return to the prisoner the

Digitized by Google

valuables he wore at the time of his imprisonment, his clothes, and papers, if the minister's order has not otherwise directed."

"What was the minister's order as to this Marchiali?"—"Nothing; for the unhappy man arrived here without jewels, without papers, and almost without clothes."—"See how simple it all is! Indeed, Baisemeaux, you make a mountain of everything. Remain here, and make them bring the prisoner to the governor's house."

Baisemeaux obeyed. He summoned his lieutenant, and gave him an order, which the latter passed on, without disturbing himself about it, to the next whom it concerned. Half an hour afterwards they heard a gate shut in the court; it was the door to the dungeon which had just rendered up its prey to the free air. Aramis blew out all the candles which lighted the room but one, which he left burning behind the door. This flickering glare prevented the sight from resting steadily on any object. It multiplied tenfold the changing forms and shadows of the place by its wavering uncertainty. Steps drew near. "Go and meet your men," said Aramis to Baisemeaux.

The governor obeyed. The sergeant and turnkeys disappeared. Baisemeaux re-entered, followed by a prisoner. Aramis had placed himself in the shade; he saw without being seen. Baisemeaux, in an agitated tone of voice, made the young man acquainted with the order which set him at liberty. The prisoner listened, without making a single gesture or saying a word.

"You will swear,—the regulation requires it,"—added the governor, "never to reveal anything that you have seen or heard in the Bastille." The prisoner perceived a crucifix; he stretched out his hands, and swore with his lips. "And now, Monsieur, that you are free, whither do you intend going?" The prisoner turned his head, as if looking behind him for some protection which he had expected. Then was it that Aramis came out of the shadow. "I am here," he said, "to render the gentleman whatever service he may please to ask." The prisoner slightly reddened, and without hesitation passed his arm through that of Aramis. "God have you in his holy keeping!" he said, in a voice the firmness of which made the governor tremble as much as the form of the blessing astonished him.

Aramis, on shaking hands with Baisemeaux, said to him: "Does my order trouble you? Do you fear their finding it here, should they come to search?"—"I desire to keep it, Monseigneur," said Baisemeaux. "If they found it here, it

would be a certain indication of my ruin, and in that case you would be a powerful and a last auxiliary for me."—"Being your accomplice, you mean?" answered Aramis, shrugging his shoulders. "Adieu, Baisemeaux!" said he.

The horses were in waiting, making the carriage shake with their impatience. Baisemeaux accompanied the bishop to the bottom of the steps. Aramis caused his companion to enter before him, then followed, and without giving the driver any further order, "Go on!" said he. The carriage rattled over the pavement of the courtyard. An officer with a torch went before the horses, and gave orders at every post to let them pass. During the time taken in opening all the barriers, Aramis barely breathed, and you might have heard his heart beat against his ribs. The prisoner, buried in a corner of the carriage, made no more sign of life than his companion. At length a jolt more severe than the others announced to them that they had cleared the last watercourse. Behind the carriage closed the last gate, —that in the Rue St. Antoine. No more walls either on the right or left; heaven everywhere, liberty everywhere, life everywhere! The horses, kept in check by a vigorous hand, went quietly as far as the middle of the faubourg. There they began to trot. Little by little, whether they warmed over it or whether they were urged, they gained in swiftness; and once past Bercy, the carriage seemed to fly, so great was the ardour of the coursers. These horses ran thus as far as Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, where relays were waiting. Then four instead of two whirled the carriage away in the direction of Melun, and pulled up for a moment in the middle of the forest of Sénart. No doubt the order had been given the postilion beforehand, for Aramis had no occasion even to make a sign.

"What is the matter?" asked the prisoner, as if waking from a long dream.—"The matter is, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "that before going further, it is necessary that your royal Highness and I should converse."—"I will wait an opportunity, Monsieur," answered the young prince.

"We could not have a better, Monseigneur; we are in the middle of a forest, and no one can hear us."—"The postilion?" —"The postilion of this relay is deaf and dumb, Monseigneur." —"I am at your service, M. d'Herblay."—"Is it your pleasure to remain in the carriage?"—"Yes; we are comfortably seated, and I like this carriage; it has restored me to liberty."

"Wait, Monseigneur; there is yet a precaution to be taken." —"What?"—"We are here on the highway; cavaliers or

carriages travelling like ourselves might pass, and seeing us stopping deem us in some difficulty. Let us avoid offers of assistance, which would embarrass us."—"Give the postilion orders to conceal the carriage in one of the side avenues."—"'Tis exactly what I wished to do, Monseigneur."

Aramis made a sign to the deaf and dumb driver of the carriage, whom he touched on the arm. The latter dismounted, took the leaders by the bridle, and led them over the velvet sward and the mossy grass of a winding alley, at the bottom of which, on this moonless night, the deep shades formed a curtain blacker than ink. This done, the man lay down on a slope near his horses, which on either side kept nibbling the young oak shoots.

"I am listening," said the young prince to Aramis; "but what are you doing there?"—"I am disarming myself of my pistols, of which we have no further need, Monseigneur."

CHAPTER CCXV

THE TEMPTER

"Ay, Prince," said Aramis, turning in the carriage towards his companion, "weak creature as I am, so unpretending in genius, so low in the scale of intelligent beings, it has never yet happened to me to converse with a man without penetrating his thoughts through that living mask which has been thrown over our mind in order to retain its expression. But to-night, in this darkness, in the reserve which you maintain, I can read nothing on your features, and something tells me that I shall have great difficulty in wresting from you a sincere declaration. I beseech you, then, not for love of me,—for subjects should never weigh as anything in the balance which princes hold,—but for love of yourself, to attend to every syllable I may utter, and to every tone of my voice,—which under our present grave circumstances will all have a sense and value as important as any words ever spoken in the world."—"I listen," repeated the young prince, decidedly, "without either eagerly seeking or fearing anything you are about to say to me;" and he sank still deeper in the thick cushions of the carriage, trying to deprive his companion not only of the sight of him, but even of the very idea of his presence.

Black was the darkness which fell wide and dense from the summits of the intertwining trees. The carriage, covered in by

this vast roof, would not have received a particle of light, not even if a ray could have struggled through the wreaths of mist which were rising in the avenue of the wood.

"Monseigneur," resumed Aramis, "you know the history of the government which to-day controls France. The king issued from an infancy imprisoned like yours, obscure as yours, and confined as yours; only, instead of enduring, like yourself, this slavery in a prison, this obscurity in solitude, these straitened circumstances in concealment, he has borne all these miseries, humiliations, and distresses in full daylight, under the pitiless sun of royalty,—on an elevation so flooded with light, where every stain appears a miserable blemish, and every glory a stain. The king has suffered; it rankles in his mind, and he will avenge himself. He will be a bad king. I say not that he will pour out blood, like Louis XI. or Charles IX., for he has no mortal injuries to avenge; but he will devour the means and substance of his people, for he has himself suffered injuriously as to his own welfare and possessions. In the first place, then, I quite acquit my conscience, when I consider openly the merits and faults of this prince; and if I condemn him, my conscience absolves me."

Aramis paused. It was not to ascertain if the silence of the forest remained undisturbed, but it was to gather up his thoughts from the very bottom of his soul, and to leave the thoughts he had uttered sufficient time to eat deeply into the mind of his companion. "All that God does, he does well," continued the Bishop of Vannes; "and I am so persuaded of it that I have long been thankful to have been chosen depositary of the secret which I have aided you to discover. To a just Providence was necessary an instrument, at once penetrating, persevering, and convinced, to accomplish a great work. I am this instrument. I possess penetration, perseverance, conviction; I govern a mysterious people, who has taken for its motto the motto of God, *Patiens quia æternus*." The prince moved. "I divine, Monseigneur, why you raise your head, and that my having rule over a people astonishes you. You did not know you were dealing with a king: oh, Monseigneur, king of a people very humble, very poor,—humble, because they have no force save when creeping; poor, because never, almost never in this world, do my people reap the harvest they sow, or eat the fruit they cultivate. They labour for an abstract idea; they heap together all the atoms of their power to form one man; and round this man, with the sweat of their labour, they create a misty halo

which his genius shall, in turn, render a glory gilded with the rays of all the crowns in Christendom. Such is the man you have beside you, Monseigneur. He has drawn you from the abyss for a great purpose, and he desires, in furtherance of this sublime purpose, to raise you above the powers of the earth, —above himself."

The prince lightly touched Aramis's arm. "You speak to me," he said, "of that religious order whose chief you are. For me the result of your words is, that the day you desire to hurl down the man you shall have raised, the event will be accomplished; and that you will keep under your hand your creature of to-day."—"Undeceive yourself, Monseigneur," replied the bishop. "I should not take the trouble to play this terrible game with your royal Highness, if I had not a double interest in winning. The day you are elevated, you are elevated for ever; you will overturn the footstool, as you rise, and will send it rolling so far that not even the sight of it will ever again recall to you its right to your remembrance."—"Oh, Monsieur!"

"Your movement, Monseigneur, arises from an excellent disposition. I thank you. Be well assured, I aspire to more than gratitude! I am convinced that when arrived at the summit you will judge me still more worthy to be your friend; and then, Monseigneur, we two will do such great deeds that ages hereafter shall speak of them."—"Tell me plainly, Monsieur,—tell me without disguise,—what I am to-day, and what you aim at my being to-morrow."—"You are the son of King Louis XIII., brother of Louis XIV.; you are the natural and legitimate heir to the throne of France. In keeping you near him, as Monsieur has been kept,—Monsieur, your younger brother,—the king would reserve to himself the right of being legitimate sovereign. The doctors only and God could dispute his legitimacy. But the doctors always prefer the king who is to the king who is not. God has wrought against himself in wronging a prince who is an honest man. But God has willed that you should be persecuted; and this persecution to-day consecrates you king of France. You had then a right to reign, seeing that it is disputed; you had a right to be proclaimed, seeing that you have been concealed; you are of kingly blood, since no one has dared to shed your blood as your servants' has been shed. Now see what he has done for you,—this God whom you have so often accused of having in every way thwarted you! He has given you the features, figure, age, and voice of your brother; and the very causes of your persecution

Digitized by Google

are about to become those of your triumphant restoration. To-morrow, after to-morrow,—from the very first, regal phantom, living shade of Louis XIV., you will sit upon his throne, whence the will of Heaven, confided in execution to the arm of man, will have hurled him without hope of return."

"I understand," said the prince; "my brother's blood will not be shed, then."—"You will be sole arbiter of his fate."—"The secret of which they made an evil use against me?"—"You will employ it against him. What did he do to conceal it? He concealed you. Living image of himself, you will defeat the conspiracy of Mazarin and Anne of Austria. You, my Prince, will have the same interest in concealing him, who will as a prisoner resemble you, as you will resemble him as king."

"I return to what I was saying to you. Who will guard him?"—"Who guarded you?"—"You know this secret,—you have made use of it with regard to myself. Who else knows it?"—"The queen-mother and Madame de Chevreuse."—"What will they do?"—"Nothing, if you choose."—"How is that?"—"How can they recognise you, if you act so that no one can recognise you?"

"'Tis true; but there are grave difficulties."—"State them, Prince."—"My brother is married; I cannot take my brother's wife."—"I will cause Spain to consent to a divorce: it is in the interest of your new policy; it is human morality. All that is really noble and really useful in this world will find its account therein."

"The imprisoned king will speak."—"To whom do you think he should speak,—to the walls?"—"You mean, by walls, the men in whom you put confidence."

"If need be, yes. And besides, your royal Highness—"—"Besides?"—"I was going to say, that the designs of Providence do not stop on such a fair road. Every scheme of this calibre is completed by its results, like a geometrical calculation. The king in prison will not be for you the cause of embarrassment that you have been for the king enthroned. His soul is naturally proud and impatient; it is, moreover, disarmed and enfeebled by being accustomed to honours, and by the licence of supreme power. God, who has willed that the concluding step in the geometrical calculation I have had the honour of describing to your royal Highness should be your accession to the throne and the destruction of him who is hurtful to you, has also determined that the conquered one shall soon end both his own and your sufferings. Therefore his soul and body have

been adapted for but a brief agony. Put into prison as a private individual, left alone with your doubts, deprived of everything, you have met all with the force of uninterrupted custom. But your brother, a captive, forgotten, and in bonds, will not long endure the calamity; and Heaven will resume his soul at the appointed time,—that is to say, soon."

At this point in Aramis's gloomy analysis a bird of night uttered from the depths of the forest that prolonged and plaintive cry which makes every creature tremble. "I will exile the deposed king," said Philippe, shuddering; "'twill be more humane."

"The king's good pleasure will decide the point," said Aramis. "But has the problem been well put? Have I brought out the solution according to the wishes or the foresight of your royal Highness?"—"Yes, Monsieur, yes; you have forgotten nothing,—except, indeed, two things."—"The first?"—"Let us speak of it at once, with the same frankness we have already used. Let us speak of the causes which may bring about the ruin of all the hopes we have conceived. Let us speak of the dangers we incur."

"They would be immense, infinite, terrific, insurmountable, if, as I have said, all things did not concur in rendering them absolutely of no account. There is no danger either for you or for me, if the constancy and intrepidity of your royal Highness are equal to that perfection of resemblance to your brother which Nature has bestowed upon you. I repeat it, there are no dangers,—only obstacles; a word, indeed, which I find in all languages, but have always ill understood, and, were I king, would have obliterated as useless and absurd."

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur; there is a very serious obstacle, an insurmountable danger, which you are forgetting."—"Ah!" said Aramis.—"There is conscience, which cries aloud; remorse, which lacerates."—"Oh! that is true," said the bishop; "there is a weakness of heart of which you remind me. Oh! you are right; that, indeed, is an immense obstacle. The horse afraid of the ditch leaps into the middle of it, and is killed! The man who tremblingly crosses his sword with that of another leaves loopholes by which death enters!"

"Have you a brother?" said the young man to Aramis.—"I am alone in the world," said the latter, with a hard, dry voice. —"But, surely there is some one in the world whom you love?" added Philippe.—"No one!—Yes, I love you."

The young man sank into so profound a silence that the sound

of his breathing seemed to Aramis like a roaring tumult. "Monseigneur," he resumed, "I have not said all I had to say to your royal Highness; I have not offered you all the salutary counsels and useful resources which I have at my disposal. It is useless to flash bright visions before the eyes of one who loves darkness; useless, too, is it to let the grand roar of the cannon sound in the ears of one who loves repose and the quiet of the country. Monseigneur, I have your happiness spread out before me in my thoughts. I will let it fall from my lips; take it up carefully for yourself, who look with such tender regard upon the bright heavens, the verdant meadows, the pure air. I know a country full of delights, an unknown Paradise, a corner of the world where alone, unfettered, and unknown, in the woods, amidst flowers, and streams of rippling water, you will forget all the misery that human folly has so recently allotted you. Oh, listen to me, my Prince! I do not jest. I have a soul, and can read to the depths of your own. I will not take you, unready for your task, in order to cast you into the crucible of my own desires or my caprice or my ambition. Everything or nothing! You are chilled, sick at heart, almost overcome by the excess of emotion which but one hour's liberty has produced in you. For me, that is a certain and unmistakable sign that you do not wish for large and long respiration. Let us choose, then, a life more humble, better suited to our strength. Heaven is my witness that I wish your happiness to be the result of the trial to which I have exposed you."

"Speak, speak!" said the prince, with a vivacity which did not escape Aramis.—"I know," resumed the prelate, "in the Bas-Poitou, a canton of which no one in France suspects the existence. Twenty leagues of country,—it is immense, is it not? Twenty leagues, Monseigneur, all covered with water and herbage and reeds; the whole studded with islands covered with woods. These large marshes, covered with reeds as with a thick mantle, sleep silently and calmly under the smiling sun. A few fishermen with their families indolently pass their lives away there, with their large rafts of poplars and alders, the flooring formed of reeds, and the roof woven out of thick rushes. These barks, these floating houses, are wafted to and fro by the changing winds. Whenever they touch a bank, it is but by chance; and so gently, too, that the sleeping fisherman is not awakened by the shock. Should he wish to land, it is because he has seen a large flight of landrails or plovers, of wild ducks, teal, widgeon, or woodcocks, which fall an easy prey to his nets

or his gun. Silver shad, eels, greedy pike, red and grey mullet, fall in masses into his nets; he has but to choose the finest and largest, and return the others to the waters. Never yet has the foot of man, be he soldier or simple citizen,—never has any one, indeed, penetrated into that district. The sun's rays there are soft and tempered; in plots of solid earth, whose soil is rich and fertile, grows the vine, which nourishes with its generous juice its black and white grapes. Once a week a boat is sent to fetch the bread which has been baked at an oven,—the common property of all. There, like the seigneurs of early days,—powerful because of your dogs, your fishing-lines, your guns, and your beautiful reed-built house,—would you live, rich in the produce of the chase, in the plenitude of security. There would years of your life roll away, at the end of which, unrecognisable, transformed, you will have compelled Heaven to reshape your destiny. There are a thousand pistoles in this bag, Monseigneur,—more than sufficient to purchase the whole marsh of which I have spoken; more than enough to live there as many years as you have days to live; more than enough to constitute you the richest, the freest, and the happiest man in the country. Accept it, as I offer it to you,—sincerely, cheerfully. Forthwith, from the carriage here we will unharness two of the horses; the mute, my servant, shall conduct you—travelling by night, sleeping by day—to the locality I have mentioned; and I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have rendered to my prince the service that he himself preferred. I shall have made one man happy; and Heaven for that will hold me in better account than if I had made one man powerful,—for that is far more difficult. And now, Monseigneur, your answer to this proposition? Here is the money. Nay, do not hesitate! At Poitou you can risk nothing, except the chance of catching the fevers prevalent there; and even of them, the so-called wizards of the country may cure you for your pistoles. If you play the other game, you run the chance of being assassinated on a throne or of being strangled in a prison. Upon my soul, I assure you, now I compare them together, upon my life, I should hesitate."

"Monsieur," replied the young prince, "before I determine, let me alight from this carriage, walk on the ground, and consult that voice by which God speaks in unsullied Nature. Ten minutes, and I will answer."—"As you please, Monseigneur," said Aramis, bending before him with respect,—so solemn and august in its tone and address had been the voice which had just spoken.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXVI

CROWN AND TIARA

ARAMIS was the first to descend from the carriage; he held the door open for the young man. He saw him place his foot on the mossy ground with a trembling of the whole body, and walk round the carriage with an unsteady and almost tottering step. It seemed as if the poor prisoner were unaccustomed to walk on God's earth. It was the 15th of August, about eleven o'clock at night; thick clouds, portending a tempest, overspread the heavens, and shrouded all light and prospect beneath their heavy folds. The extremities of the avenues were imperceptibly detached from the copse by a lighter shadow of opaque grey, which upon closer examination became visible in the midst of the obscurity. But the fragrance which ascended from the grass, fresher and more penetrating than that which exhaled from the trees around him; the warm and balmy air which enveloped him for the first time in years; the ineffable enjoyment of liberty in an open country,—spoke to the prince in a language so intoxicating that notwithstanding the great reserve, we should almost say the dissimulation, of which we have tried to give an idea, he could not restrain his emotion, and breathed a sigh of joy. Then, by degrees, he raised his aching head and inhaled the perfumed air, as it was wafted in gentle gusts across his uplifted face. Crossing his arms on his chest as if to control this new sensation of delight, he drank in delicious draughts of that mysterious air which penetrates at night-time through lofty forests. The sky he was contemplating, the murmuring waters, the moving creatures,—were not these real? Was not Aramis a madman to suppose that he had aught else to dream of in this world? Those exciting pictures of country life, so free from cares, from fears and troubles; that ocean of happy days which glitters incessantly before all youthful imaginations,—those were real allurements wherewith to fascinate an unhappy prisoner, worn out by prison life and emaciated by the close air of the Bastille. It was the picture, it will be remembered, drawn by Aramis when he offered to the prince the thousand pistoles which he had with him in the carriage, the enchanted Eden which the deserts of Bas-Poitou hid from the eyes of the world.

Similar to these were the reflections of Aramis as he watched,

Digitized by Google

with an anxiety impossible to describe, the silent progress of the emotions of Philippe, whom he perceived gradually becoming more and more absorbed in his meditations. The young prince was offering up an inward prayer to Heaven for a ray of light upon that perplexity whence would issue his death or his life. It was an anxious time for the Bishop of Vannes, who had never before been so perplexed. Was his iron will, accustomed to overcome all obstacles, never finding itself inferior or vanquished, to be foiled in so vast a project from not having foreseen the influence which a few tree-leaves and a few cubic feet of air might have on the human mind? Aramis, overwhelmed by anxiety, contemplated the painful struggle which was taking place in Philippe's mind. This suspense lasted throughout the ten minutes which the young man had requested. During that eternity Philippe continued gazing with an imploring and sorrowful look towards the heavens. Aramis did not remove the piercing glance he had fixed on Philippe. Suddenly the young man bowed his head. His thoughts returned to the earth, his looks perceptibly hardened, his brow contracted, his mouth assumed an expression of fierce courage; and then again his look became fixed, but now it reflected the flame of mundane splendours,—now it was like the face of Satan on the mountain when he brought into view the kingdoms and the powers of earth as temptations to Jesus. Aramis's appearance then became as gentle as it had before been gloomy.

Philippe, seizing his hand in a quick, agitated manner, exclaimed: "Let us go where the crown of France is to be found!" —"Is this your decision, Monseigneur?" asked Aramis.—"It is."—"Irrevocably so?" Philippe did not even deign to reply. He gazed earnestly at the bishop, as if to ask him if it were possible for a man to waver after having once made up his mind. "Those looks are flashes of fire which portray character," said Aramis, bowing over Philippe's hand. "You will be great, Monseigneur; I will answer for that."

"Let us resume our conversation. I wished to discuss two points with you: in the first place, the dangers or the obstacles we may meet with. That point is decided. The other is the conditions you intend to impose on me. It is your turn to speak, M. d'Herblay."—"The conditions, Monseigneur?"—"Doubtless. You will not check me in my course for a trifle, and you will not do me the injustice to suppose that I think you have no interest in this affair. Therefore, without subterfuge or hesitation, tell me the truth."

Digitized by Google

"I will do so, Monseigneur. Once a king—"—"When will that be?"—"To-morrow evening—I mean in the night."—"Explain to me how."—"When I shall have asked your Highness a question."—"Do so."

"I sent to your Highness a man in my confidence, with instructions to deliver some closely written notes, carefully drawn up, which will thoroughly acquaint your Highness with the different persons who compose and will compose your court."—"I perused all the notes."—"Attentively?"—"I know them by heart."

"And understood them? Pardon me, but I may venture to ask that question of a poor, abandoned captive of the Bastille. It will not be requisite in a week's time to question further a mind like yours, when you will then be in full possession of liberty and power."—"Interrogate me, then, and I will be a scholar repeating his lesson to his master."

"We will begin with your family, Monseigneur."—"My mother, Anne of Austria?—all her sorrows, her painful malady? Oh, I know her, I know her!"—"Your second brother?" asked Aramis, bowing.—"To these notes," replied the prince, "you have added portraits so faithfully painted that I am able to recognise the persons whose characters, manners, and history you have so carefully portrayed. Monsieur, my brother, is a fine, dark young man, with a pale face; he does not love his wife, Henrietta, whom I, Louis XIV., loved a little, and still flirt with, even although she made me weep on the day she wished to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Vallière from her service in disgrace."

"You will have to be careful with regard to watchfulness of the latter," said Aramis; "she is sincerely attached to the actual king. The eyes of a woman who loves are not easily deceived."—"She is fair; has blue eyes, whose affectionate gaze will reveal her identity. She halts slightly in her gait. She writes a letter every day, to which I shall have to send an answer by M. de Saint-Aignan."—"Do you know the latter?"—"As if I saw him; and I know the last verses he composed for me, as well as those I composed in answer to his."

"Very good. Do you know your ministers?"—"Colbert, an ugly, dark-browed man, but intelligent; his hair covering his forehead; a large, heavy, full head; the mortal enemy of M. Fouquet."—"We need not disturb ourselves about M. Colbert."—"No; because necessarily you will require me to

exile him, will you not?" Aramis, struck with admiration at the remark, said, "You will become very great, Monseigneur."—"You see," added the prince, "that I know my lesson by heart; and with Heaven's assistance, and yours afterwards, I shall seldom go wrong."

"You have still a very awkward pair of eyes to deal with, Monseigneur."—"Yes; the captain of the musketeers, M. d'Artagnan, your friend."—"Yes; I can well say 'my friend.'"—"He who escorted La Vallière to Chaillot; he who delivered up Monk, in a box, to Charles II.; he who so faithfully served my mother; he to whom the crown of France owes so much that it owes everything. Do you intend to ask me to exile him also?"—"Never, Sire! D'Artagnan is a man to whom at a certain given time I will undertake to reveal everything. But be on your guard with him; for if he discovers our plot before it is revealed to him, you or I will certainly be killed or taken. He is a man of action."

"I will consider. Now tell me about M. Fouquet; what do you wish to be done with regard to him?"—"One moment more, I entreat you, Monseigneur; and forgive me if I seem to fail in respect in questioning you further."—"It is your duty to do so, and, more than that, your right also."

"Before we pass to M. Fouquet, I should very much regret forgetting another friend of mine."—"M. du Vallon, the Hercules of France, you mean. Oh! so far as he is concerned, his fortune is assured."—"No; it is not he of whom I intended to speak."—"The Comte de la Fère, then?"—"And his son,—the son of all four of us."

"The lad who is dying of love for La Vallière, of whom my brother so disloyally deprived him? Be easy on that score! I shall know how to restore him. Tell me one thing, M. d'Herblay! Do men, when they love, forget the treachery that has been shown them? Can a man ever forgive the woman who has betrayed him? Is that a French custom; is it a law of the human heart?"—"A man who loves deeply, as deeply as Raoul loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière, finally forgets the fault of the woman he loves; but I do not know whether Raoul will forget."—"I will provide for that. Have you anything further to say about your friend?"—"No; that is all."

"Well, then, now for M. Fouquet. What do you wish me to do for him?"—"To continue him as superintendent, as he has hitherto acted, I entreat you."—"Be it so; but he is the first minister at present."—"Not quite so."—"A king ignorant

and embarrassed as I shall be, will, as a matter of course, require a first minister of State."

"Your Majesty will require a friend."—"I have only one, and that is yourself."—"You will have many others by and by, but none so devoted, none so zealous for your glory."—"You will be my first minister of State."—"Not immediately, Monseigneur; for that would give rise to too much suspicion and astonishment."

"M. de Richelieu, the first minister of my grandmother, Marie de Médicis, was simply Bishop of Luçon, as you are Bishop of Vannes."—"I perceive that your royal Highness has studied my notes to great advantage; your amazing perspicacity overpowers me with delight."—"I know, indeed, that M. de Richelieu, by means of the queen's protection, soon became cardinal."—"It would be better," said Aramis, bowing, "that I should not be appointed first minister until after your royal Highness had procured my nomination as cardinal."

"You shall be nominated before two months are past, M. d'Herblay. But that is a matter of very trifling moment; you would not offend me if you were to ask more than that, and you would cause me serious regret if you were to limit yourself to that."—"In that case I have something still further to hope for, Monseigneur."—"Speak! speak!"

"M. Fouquet will not continue long at the head of affairs; he will soon get old. He is fond of pleasure, which at present is compatible with his labours, thanks to the youthfulness which he still retains; but this youthfulness will disappear at the approach of the first serious annoyance, or upon the first illness he may experience. We will spare him the annoyance, because he is a brave and noble-hearted man; but we cannot save him from ill-health. So it is determined. When you shall have paid all M. Fouquet's debts, and restored the finances to a sound condition, M. Fouquet will be able to remain the sovereign ruler in his little court of poets and painters; we shall have made him rich. When that has been done, and I shall have become your royal Highness's prime minister, I shall be able to think of my own interests and yours."

The young man looked at his interlocutor. "M. de Richelieu, of whom we were speaking just now," said Aramis, "was very blamable in the fixed idea he had of governing France unaided. He allowed two kings—King Louis XIII. and himself—to be seated upon the same throne, when he might have installed them more conveniently upon two separate thrones."—"Upon

two thrones?" said the prince, thoughtfully.—"In fact," pursued Aramis, quietly, "a cardinal, prime minister of France, assisted by the favour and by the countenance of his Most Christian Majesty the King of France; a cardinal to whom the king his master lends the treasures of the State, his army, his counsel,—such a man would be acting with twofold injustice in applying these mighty resources to France alone. Besides," added Aramis, with a searching look into the eyes of Philippe, "you will not be a king such as your father was,—delicate in health, slow in judgment, whom all things wearied; you will be a king governing by your brain and by your sword. You would have in the government of the State no more than you could manage unaided; I should only interfere with you. Besides, our friendship ought never to be, I do not say impaired, but even grazed by a secret thought. I shall have given you the throne of France; you will confer on me the throne of Saint Peter. Whenever your loyal, firm, and mailed hand shall have for its mate the hand of a pope such as I shall be, neither Charles V., who owned two-thirds of the habitable globe, nor Charlemagne, who possessed it entirely, will reach to the height of your waist. I have no alliances; I have no predilections. I will not throw you into persecutions of heretics, nor will I cast you into the troubled waters of family dissension; I will simply say to you: The whole universe is for us two,—for me the minds of men, for you their bodies; and as I shall be the first to die, you will have my inheritance. What do you say of my plan, Monseigneur?"

"I say that you render me happy and proud, for no other reason than that of having comprehended you thoroughly. M. d'Herblay, you shall be cardinal, and when cardinal, my prime minister; and then you will point out to me the necessary steps to be taken to secure your election as pope, and I will take them. You can ask what guarantees from me you please."—"It is useless. I shall never act except in such a manner that you will be the gainer; I shall never mount until I shall have first placed you upon the round of the ladder immediately above me; I shall always hold myself sufficiently aloof from you to escape incurring your jealousy, sufficiently near to sustain your personal advantage and to watch over your friendship. All the contracts in the world are easily violated because the interest included in them inclines more to one side than to another. With us, however, it will never be the case; I have no need of guarantees."

"And so—my brother—will disappear?"—"Simply. We

will remove him from his bed by means of a plank which yields to the pressure of the finger. Having retired to rest as a crowned sovereign, he will awaken in captivity. Alone, you will rule from that moment, and you will have no interest more urgent than that of keeping me near you."—"I believe it. There is my hand, M. d'Herblay."

"Allow me to kneel before you, Sire, most respectfully. We will embrace each other on the day when we shall both have on our temples—you the crown, and I the tiara."—"Embrace me this very day; and be more than great, more than skilful, more than sublime in genius,—be good to me, be my father!"

Aramis was almost overcome as he listened to the voice of the prince. He fancied he detected in his own heart an emotion hitherto unknown to him; but this impression was speedily removed. "His father!" he thought; "yes, his Holy Father." The two resumed their places in the carriage, which sped rapidly along the road leading to Vaux-le-Vicomte.

CHAPTER CCXVII

THE CHATEAU DE VAUX-LE-VICOMTE

THE Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, situated about a league from Melun, had been built by Fouquet in 1653. There was then but little money in France; Mazarin had taken all that there was, and Fouquet had expended the remainder. However, as certain men have fertile faults and useful vices, Fouquet, in scattering broadcast millions of money in the construction of this palace, had found a means of bringing, as the result of his generous profusion, three illustrious men together,—Levau, the architect of the building; Lenôtre, the designer of the gardens; and Lebrun, the decorator of the apartments. If the Château de Vaux possessed a single fault with which it could be reproached, it was its grandiose, pretentious character. It is even at the present day proverbial to calculate the number of acres of roofing, the reparation of which would, in our age, be the ruin of fortunes cramped and narrowed as the epoch itself. Vaux-le-Vicomte, when its magnificent gates, supported by caryatides, have been passed through, has the principal front of the main building opening upon a vast court of honour, enclosed by deep ditches, bordered by a magnificent stone

balustrade. Nothing could be more noble in appearance than the forecourt of the middle, raised upon the flight of steps, like a king upon his throne, having around it four pavilions forming the angles, the immense Ionic columns of which rise majestically to the whole height of the building. The friezes ornamented with arabesques, and the pediments which crown the pilasters, confer richness and grace upon every part of the building, while the domes which surmount the whole add proportion and majesty. This mansion, built by a subject, bore a far greater resemblance to a royal residence than those that Wolsey fancied he must present to his master for fear of rendering him jealous. But if magnificence and splendour were displayed in any one particular part of this palace more than in another,—if anything could be preferred to the wonderful arrangement of the interior, to the sumptuousness of the gilding, and to the profusion of the painting and statues, it would be the park and gardens of Vaux. The fountains, which were regarded as wonderful in 1653, are still so at the present time; the cascades awakened the admiration of kings and princes; and as for the famous grotto, the theme of so many poetical effusions, the residence of that illustrious nymph of Vaux, whom Pellisson made converse with La Fontaine, we must be spared the description of all its beauties. We will do as Despréaux did,—we will enter the park, the trees of which are of eight years' growth only, and whose summits, already superb, blushingly unfold their leaves to the earliest rays of the rising sun. Lenôtre had accelerated the pleasure of Mecænas; all the nursery-grounds had furnished trees whose growth had been promoted by careful culture and fertilisation. Every tree in the neighbourhood which presented a fair appearance of beauty or stature had been taken up by its roots and transplanted in the park. Fouquet could well afford to purchase trees to ornament his park, since he had bought up three villages and their appurtenances to increase its extent. M. de Scudéry said of this palace, that, for the purpose of keeping the grounds and gardens well watered, M. Fouquet had divided a river into a thousand fountains, and gathered the waters of a thousand fountains into torrents. This same M. de Scudéry said a great many other things in his *Clélie*, about this palace of Valterre, the charms of which he describes most minutely. We should be far wiser to send our curious readers to Vaux to judge for themselves than to refer them to the *Clélie;* and yet there are as many leagues from Paris to Vaux as there are volumes of the *Clélie.*

Digitized by Google

This magnificent palace had been got ready for the reception of the greatest reigning sovereign of the time. M. Fouquet's friends had transported thither, some their actors and their dresses, others their troops of sculptors and artists; others still their ready-mended pens,—floods of impromptus were contemplated. The cascades, somewhat rebellious nymphs though they were, poured forth their waters brighter than crystal; they scattered over the bronze tritons and nereids their waves of foam, which glistened in the rays of the sun. An army of servants were hurrying to and fro in squadrons in the courtyard and corridors; while Fouquet, who had only that morning arrived, moved about with a calm, observant glance, giving his last orders, after his intendants had inspected everything.

It was, as we have said, the 15th of August. The sun poured down its burning rays upon the heathen deities of marble and bronze; it raised the temperature of the water in the conch shells, and ripened, on the walls, those magnificent peaches of which the king, fifty years later, spoke so regretfully when, at, Marly, on an occasion of a scarcity of the finer sorts of peaches being complained of in the beautiful gardens there,—gardens which had cost France double the amount that had been expended on Vaux,—the *great king* observed to some one, "You are too young to have eaten any of M. Fouquet's peaches." Oh, fame! Oh the blazonry of renown! Oh the glory of the earth! That very man whose judgment was so sound where merit was concerned,—he who had swept into his coffers the inheritance of Nicholas Fouquet, who had robbed him of Lenôtre and Lebrun, and had sent him to rot for the remainder of his life in one of the State prisons,—remembered only the peaches of that vanquished, crushed, forgotten enemy! It was to little purpose that Fouquet had squandered thirty million livres in the fountains of his gardens, in the crucibles of his sculptors, in the writing-desks of his literary friends, in the portfolios of his painters; vainly had he fancied that thereby he might be remembered. A peach—a blushing, rich-flavoured fruit, nestling in the trellis-work on the garden-wall, hidden beneath its long green leaves,—this small vegetable production, that a dormouse would nibble up without a thought, was sufficient to recall to the memory of this great monarch the mournful shade of the last superintendent of France.

With a complete assurance that Aramis had made arrangements fairly to distribute the vast number of guests throughout the palace, and that he had not omitted to attend to any of the

internal regulations for their comfort, Fouquet devoted his entire attention to the *ensemble*. In one direction Gourville showed him the preparations which had been made for the fireworks; in another, Molière led him over the theatre; at last, after he had visited the chapel, the salons, and the galleries, and was again going downstairs, exhausted with fatigue, Fouquet saw Aramis on the staircase. The prelate beckoned to him. The superintendent joined his friend, who paused before a large picture scarcely finished. Applying himself, heart and soul to his work, the painter, Lebrun, covered with perspiration, stained with paint, pale from fatigue and inspiration, was putting the last finishing touches with his rapid brush. It was the portrait of the king, whom they were expecting, dressed in the court suit which Percerin had condescended to show beforehand to the Bishop of Vannes. Fouquet placed himself before this portrait, which seemed to live, as one might say, in the cool freshness of its flesh and in its warmth of colour. He gazed upon it long and fixedly, estimated the prodigious labour that had been bestowed upon it, and not being able to find any recompense sufficiently great for this herculean effort, he passed his arm round the painter's neck, and embraced him. The superintendent, by this action, had ruined a suit of clothes worth a thousand pistoles, but he had invigorated Lebrun. It was a happy moment for the artist; it was an unhappy one for M. Percerin, who was walking behind Fouquet, and was engaged in admiring, in Lebrun's painting, the suit that he had made for his majesty,—a perfect work of art, as he called it, which was not to be matched except in the wardrobe of the superintendent. His distress and his exclamations were interrupted by a signal which had been given from the summit of the mansion. In the direction of Melun, in the still empty, open plain, the sentinels of Vaux had perceived the advancing procession of the king and the queens. His Majesty was entering into Melun with his long train of carriages and cavaliers.

"In an hour—" said Aramis to Fouquet.—"In an hour!" replied the latter, sighing.—"And the people who ask one another what is the good of these royal *fêtes!*" continued the Bishop of Vannes, laughing with his forced smile.—"Alas! I, too, who am not the people, ask the same thing."—"I will answer you in four-and-twenty hours, Monseigneur. Assume a cheerful countenance, for it is a day of joy."

"Well, believe me or not, as you like, D'Herblay," said the superintendent, with a swelling heart, pointing at the *cortége* of

Louis, visible in the horizon, "the king certainly loves me but very little, nor do I care much for him; but I cannot tell you how it is that since he is approaching my house—"—"Well, what?"—"Well, then, since I know Louis is on his way hither, he is more sacred to me; he is my king, he is almost dear to me."

"*Dear!*—yes," said Aramis, playing upon the word, as the Abbé Terray did, at a later period, with Louis XV.—"Do not laugh, D'Herblay; I feel that if he were really to wish it, I could love that young man."—"You should not say that to me," returned Aramis, "but rather to M. Colbert."—"To M. Colbert!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Why so?"—"Because he would allow you a pension out of the king's privy purse, as soon as he becomes superintendent," said Aramis, preparing to leave as soon as he had dealt this last blow.

"Where are you going?" returned Fouquet, with a gloomy look.—"To my own apartment, to change my costume, Monseigneur."—"Where are you lodging, D'Herblay?"—"In the blue room on the second story."—"The room immediately over the king's room?"—"Precisely."—"You will be subject to very great restraint there. What an idea to condemn yourself to a room where you cannot stir or move about!"

"During the night, Monseigneur, I sleep or read in my bed."—"And your servants?"—"I have only one person with me. I find my reader quite sufficient. Adieu, Monseigneur! Do not over-fatigue yourself; keep yourself fresh for the arrival of the king."

"We shall see you by and by, I suppose, and your friend Du Vallon also?"—"He is lodging next to me, and is at this moment dressing." Then Fouquet, bowing, with a smile passed on, like a commander-in-chief who pays the different outposts a visit after the enemy has been signalled.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXVIII

THE WINE OF MELUN

THE king had, in point of fact, entered Melun with the intention of merely passing through the city. The youthful monarch had an appetite for amusements. Only twice during the journey had he been able to catch a glimpse of La Vallière; and suspecting that his only opportunity of speaking to her would be after nightfall, in the gardens, and after the ceremonial of reception had been gone through, he had been very desirous to arrive at Vaux as early as possible. But he reckoned without his captain of the musketeers and without M. Colbert. Like Calypso, who could not be consoled at the departure of Ulysses, our Gascon could not console himself for not having guessed why Aramis had asked Percerin to show him the king's new costumes. "There is not a doubt," he said to himself, "that my friend the Bishop of Vannes had some motive in that;" and then he began to rack his brains most uselessly. D'Artagnan, so intimately acquainted with all the court intrigues, who knew the position of Fouquet better even than Fouquet himself did, had conceived the strangest fancies and suspicions at the announcement of the *fête*, which would have ruined a wealthy man, and which became impossible, utter madness even, for a man so destitute as he was. And then, the presence of Aramis, who had returned from Belle-Isle, and been nominated by Fouquet inspector-general of all the arrangements; his perseverance in mixing himself up with all the superintendent's affairs; his visit to Baisemeaux,—all this suspicious singularity of conduct had profoundly perplexed D'Artagnan during the last few weeks.

"With men of Aramis's stamp," he said, "one is never the stronger except with sword in hand. So long as Aramis continued a soldier, there was hope of getting the better of him; but since he has covered his cuirass with a stole, we are lost. But what can Aramis's object be?" and D'Artagnan plunged again into deep thought. "What does it matter to me, after all," he continued, "if his only object is to overthrow M. Colbert? And what else can he be after?" and D'Artagnan rubbed his forehead,—that fertile land, whence the ploughshare of his nails had turned up so many and such admirable ideas. He at first

thought of talking the matter over with Colbert; but his friendship for Aramis, the oath of earlier days, bound him too strictly. He revolted at the bare idea of such a thing; and, besides, he hated the financier. He wished to unburden his mind to the king; but the king would not be able to understand the suspicions which had not even the solidity of a shadow. He resolved to address himself to Aramis directly, the first time he met him. "I will take him," said the musketeer, "between a couple of candles suddenly; I will place my hand upon his heart, and he will tell me— What will he tell me? Yes, he will tell me something; for, *mordioux!* there is something underneath."

Somewhat calmer, D'Artagnan made every preparation for the journey, and took the greatest care that the military household of the king, as yet very inconsiderable in numbers, should be well officered and well disciplined in its limited proportions. The result was that through the captain's arrangements the king, on arriving at Melun, saw himself at the head of the Musketeers, his Swiss Guards, and a picket of the French Guards. It might almost have been called a small army. M. Colbert looked at the troops with great delight; he even wished there had been a third more in number. "But why?" said the king. —"To show greater honour to M. Fouquet," replied Colbert.— "To ruin him the sooner," thought D'Artagnan.

When this little army appeared before Melun, the chief magistrates came out to meet the king and to present him with the keys of the city, and invited him to enter the Hôtel de Ville to partake of the wine of honour. The king, who expected to pass through the city and to proceed to Vaux without delay, became quite red in the face from vexation. "Who was fool enough to occasion this delay?" muttered the king, between his teeth, as the chief magistrate was in the middle of a long address.—"Not I, certainly," replied D'Artagnan; "but I believe it was M. Colbert."

Colbert, having heard his name pronounced, said, "What was M. d'Artagnan good enough to say?"—"I was good enough to remark that it was you who stopped the king's progress, so that he might taste the *vin de Brie*. Was I right?"—"Quite so, Monsieur."—"In that case, then, it was you whom the king called some name or other."—"What name?"—"I hardly know; but wait a moment,—'idiot,' I think it was,—no, no, it was 'fool,' 'fool,' 'stupid.' That is what his Majesty said of the man who procured for him the wine of Melun."

D'Artagnan, after this broadside, quietly caressed his horse.

M. Colbert's large head seemed to become larger than ever. D'Artagnan, seeing how ugly anger made him, did not stop half-way. The orator still went on with his speech, while the king's colour was visibly increasing. "*Mordioux!*" said the musketeer, coolly, "the king is going to have an attack of determination of blood to the head. Where the deuce did you get hold of that idea, M. Colbert? You have no luck!"—"Monsieur," said the financier, drawing himself up, "my zeal for the king's service inspired me with the idea."—"Bah!"—"Monsieur, Melun is a city, an excellent city, which pays well, and which it would be imprudent to displease."

"There now! I, who do not pretend to be a financier, saw only one idea in your idea."—"What was that, Monsieur?"—"That of causing a little annoyance to M. Fouquet, who is making himself quite giddy on his donjons yonder, in waiting for us."

This was a home-stroke, and a hard one. Colbert was confounded by it, and retired, thoroughly discomfited. Fortunately, the speech was now at an end. The king drank the wine which was presented to him, and then all resumed their course through the city. The king bit his lips in anger; for the evening was closing in, and all hope of a walk with La Vallière was over. In order that the whole of the king's household should enter Vaux, four hours at least were necessary, owing to the different arrangements. The king, therefore, who was boiling with impatience, hurried forward as much as possible, in order to arrive before nightfall. But at the moment he was setting off again, other and fresh difficulties arose.

"Is not the king going to sleep at Melun?" said Colbert, in a low tone of voice, to D'Artagnan. M. Colbert must have been badly inspired that day, to address himself in that manner to the chief of the musketeers; for the latter guessed that the king's intention was very far from that of remaining where he was. D'Artagnan would not allow him to enter Vaux except he were well and strongly accompanied, and desired that his Majesty should not enter except with all the escort. On the other hand, he felt that these delays would irritate that impatient character beyond measure. In what way could he possibly reconcile these two difficulties? D'Artagnan took up Colbert's remark, and determined to repeat it to the king.

"Sire," he said, "M. Colbert has been asking me if your Majesty does not intend to sleep at Melun."—"Sleep at Melun! What for?" exclaimed Louis XIV. "Sleep at Melun! Who, in Heaven's name, can have thought of such a thing, when

M. Fouquet is expecting us this evening? "—"It was simply," returned Colbert, quickly, "the fear of causing your Majesty any delay; for, according to established etiquette, you cannot enter any place, with the exception of your own royal residences, until the soldiers' quarters have been marked out by the quartermaster, and the garrison has been properly distributed."

D'Artagnan listened with the greatest attention, biting his moustache; and the queens listened attentively also. They were fatigued, and would have liked to go to rest without proceeding any farther, and especially to prevent the king from walking about in the evening with M. de Saint-Aignan and the ladies of the court; for if etiquette required the princesses to remain within their own rooms, the ladies of honour, as soon as they had performed the services required of them, had no restrictions placed upon them, but were at liberty to walk about as they pleased. It will easily be conjectured that all these rival interests, gathering together in vapours, must necessarily produce clouds, and that the clouds would be followed by a tempest. The king had no moustache to gnaw, and therefore kept biting the handle of his whip instead, with ill-concealed impatience. How could he get out of it? D'Artagnan looked as agreeable as possible, and Colbert as sulky as he could. Who was there, then, with whom Louis could get in a passion? "We will consult the queen," said Louis XIV., bowing to the royal ladies.

This kindness of consideration softened Maria Theresa's heart, who was of a kind and generous disposition, and who, left to her own free will, replied: "I shall be delighted to do whatever your Majesty wishes."

"How long will it take us to get to Vaux?" inquired Anne of Austria, in slow and measured accents, placing her hand upon her suffering bosom.—"An hour for your Majesties' carriages," said D'Artagnan; "the roads are tolerably good." The king looked at him. "And a quarter of an hour for the king," he hastened to add.—"We should arrive by daylight," said Louis XIV.

"But the billeting of the king's military escort," objected Colbert, softly, "will make his Majesty lose all the advantage of his speed, however quick he may be."—"Double ass that you are!" thought D'Artagnan; "if I had any interest or motive in demolishing your credit, I could do it in ten minutes. If I were in the king's place," he added, aloud, "I should, in going to M. Fouquet, leave my escort behind me. I should go to him as a friend; I should enter accompanied only by my captain

of the guards. I should consider that I was acting more nobly, and should be invested with a still more sacred character by doing so."

Delight sparkled in the king's eyes. "That is, indeed, a very good suggestion. We will go to see a friend as friends. Those gentlemen who are with the carriages can go slowly; but we who are mounted—Forward!" and he rode off, accompanied by all those who were mounted. Colbert hid his ugly head behind his horse's neck. "I shall be quits," said D'Artagnan, as he galloped along, "by getting a little talk with Aramis this evening. And then, M. Fouquet is a man of honour. *Mordioux!* I have said so, and it must be so."

In this way, towards seven o'clock in the evening, without trumpets, without advanced guard, without outriders or musketeers, the king presented himself before the gate of Vaux, where Fouquet, who had been informed of his royal guest's approach, had been waiting for the last half-hour, with his head uncovered, surrounded by his household and his friends.

CHAPTER CCXIX

NECTAR AND AMBROSIA

FOUQUET held the stirrup of the king, who having dismounted bowed graciously, and more graciously still held out his hand to him, which Fouquet, in spite of a slight resistance on the king's part, carried respectfully to his lips. The king wished to wait in the first courtyard for the arrival of the carriages; nor had he long to wait. For the roads had been put into excellent order by the superintendent, and a stone would hardly have been found of the size of an egg the whole way from Melun to Vaux; so that the carriages, rolling along as though on a carpet, brought the ladies to Vaux, without jolting or fatigue, by eight o'clock. They were received by Madame Fouquet; and at the moment when they made their appearance, a light as bright as day burst forth from all the trees and vases and marble statues. This species of enchantment lasted until their Majesties had retired into the palace. All these wonders and magical effects,—which the chronicler has heaped up, or rather preserved, in his recital at the risk of rivalling the creations of a romancist,—these splendours whereby night seemed conquered

and Nature corrected, together with every delight and luxury combined for the satisfaction of all the senses as well as of the mind, Fouquet really offered to his sovereign in that enchanting retreat, to which no monarch could at that time boast of possessing an equal.

We do not intend to describe the grand banquet, at which all the royal guests were present, nor the concerts, nor the fairy-like and magical transformations and metamorphoses. It will be enough for our purpose to depict the countenance which the king assumed, and which, from being gay, soon wore a gloomy, constrained, and irritated expression. He remembered his own residence, and the mean style of luxury which prevailed there, —which comprised only that which was merely useful for the royal wants, without being his own personal property. The large vases of the Louvre, the old furniture and plate of Henry II., of Francis I., of Louis XI., were merely historial monuments,— they were nothing but specimens of art, relics left by his predecessors; while with Fouquet the value of the article was as much in the workmanship as in the article itself. Fouquet ate from a gold service, which artists in his own employ had modelled and cast for him. Fouquet drank wines of which the King of France did not even know the name, and drank them out of goblets each more precious than the whole royal cellar. What, too, could be said of the apartments, the hangings, the pictures, the servants and officers of every description, in Fouquet's household? What could be said of the mode of service in which etiquette was replaced by order, stiff formality by personal unrestrained comfort, and the happiness and contentment of the guest became the supreme law of all who obeyed the host? The swarm of busily engaged persons moving about noiselessly; the multitude of guests, who were, however, even less numerous than the servants who waited on them; the myriads of exquisitely prepared dishes, of gold and silver vases; the floods of dazzling light; the masses of unknown flowers, of which the hothouses had been despoiled, redundant with the luxuriance of unequalled beauty,—the harmony of all, which indeed was no more than the prelude of the promised *fête*, charmed all the guests, who testified their admiration over and over again, not by voice or gesture, but by deep silence and rapt attention,—those two languages of the courtier which acknowledge the hand of no master powerful enough to restrain them.

As for the king, his eyes filled with tears; he dared not look

at the queen. Anne of Austria, whose pride, as it ever had been, was superior to that of any creature breathing, overwhelmed her host by the contempt with which she treated everything handed to her. The young queen, kind-hearted by nature and curious by disposition, praised Fouquet, ate with an exceedingly good appetite, and asked the names of the different fruits which were placed upon the table. Fouquet replied that he did not know their names. The fruits came from his own stores; he had often cultivated them himself, having an intimate acquaintance with the cultivation of exotic fruits and plants. The king felt and appreciated the delicacy of the reply, but was only the more humiliated at it; he thought that the queen was a little too familiar in her manners, and that Anne of Austria resembled Juno a little too much; his chief anxiety, however, was that he might remain cold and distant in his behaviour, bordering slightly on the limits of extreme disdain or of simple admiration.

Fouquet had foreseen all that; he was, in fact, one of those men who foresee everything. The king had expressly declared that so long as he remained under Fouquet's roof he did not wish his own different repasts to be served in accordance with the usual etiquette, and that he would consequently dine with the rest of the company; but by the thoughtful attention of the superintendent the king's dinner was served up separately, if one may so express it, in the middle of the general table. The dinner, wonderful in every respect, from the dishes of which it was composed, comprised everything the king liked, and which he generally preferred to anything else. Louis had no excuse—he, indeed, who had the keenest appetite in his kingdom—for saying that he was not hungry. Fouquet even did better still: he indeed, in obedience to the king's expressed desire, seated himself at the table; but as soon as the soups were served, he rose and personally waited on the king, while Madame Fouquet stood behind the queen-mother's arm-chair. The disdain of Juno and the sulky fits of temper of Jupiter could not resist this exhibition of kindly feeling and polite attention. The queen ate a biscuit dipped in a glass of San-Lucar wine; and the king ate of everything, saying to Fouquet, "It is impossible, Monsieur the Superintendent, to dine better anywhere." Whereupon the whole court began, on all sides, to devour the dishes spread before them, with such enthusiasm that it looked like a cloud of Egyptian locusts settling down upon the uncut crops.

As soon, however, as his hunger was appeased, the king

became dull and gloomy again; the more so in proportion to the satisfaction he fancied he had manifested, and particularly on account of the deferential manner which his courtiers had shown towards Fouquet. D'Artagnan, who ate a good deal and drank but little, without allowing it to be noticed, did not lose a single opportunity, but made a great number of observations which he turned to good profit. When the supper was finished, the king expressed a wish not to lose the promenade. The park was illuminated; the moon, too, as if she had placed herself at the orders of the Lord of Vaux, silvered the trees and lakes with her bright phosphoric light. The air was soft and balmy; the gravelled walks through the thickly set avenues yielded luxuriously to the feet. The *fête* was complete in every respect; for the king, having met La Vallière in one of the winding paths of the wood, was able to press her by the hand and say, "I love you," without any one overhearing him, except D'Artagnan who followed, and M. Fouquet who preceded him.

The night of enchantments stole on. The king having requested to be shown to his room, there was immediately a movement in every direction. The queens passed to their own apartments, accompanied by the music of theorbos and flutes. The king found his musketeers awaiting him on the grand flight of steps; for Fouquet had brought them on from Melun, and had invited them to supper. D'Artagnan's suspicions at once disappeared. He was weary; he had supped well, and wished, for once in his life, thoroughly to enjoy a *fête* given by a man who was in every sense of the word a king. "M. Fouquet," he said, "is the man for me."

The king was conducted with the greatest ceremony to the chamber of Morpheus, of which we owe some slight description to our readers. It was the handsomest and the largest in the palace. Lebrun had painted on the vaulted ceiling the happy as well as disagreeable dreams with which Morpheus affects kings as well as other men: with everything lovely to which sleep gives birth,—its perfumes, its flowers and nectar, the wild voluptuousness or deep repose of the senses,—had the painter enriched his frescoes. It was a composition as soft and pleasing in one part as dark and terrible in another. The poisoned chalice; the glittering dagger suspended over the head of the sleeper; wizards and phantoms with hideous masks, those dim shadows more terrific than the brightness of flame or the blackness of night,—these he had made the companions of his more pleasing pictures.

Digitized by Google

No sooner had the king entered the room than a cold shiver seemed to pass through him; and when Fouquet asked him the cause of it, the king replied, turning pale, "I am sleepy."—"Does your Majesty wish for your attendants at once?"—"No; I have to talk with a few persons first," said the king. "Will you have the goodness to summon M. Colbert?" Fouquet bowed, and left the room.

CHAPTER CCXX

A GASCON, AND A GASCON AND A HALF

D'ARTAGNAN had lost no time; in fact, he was not in the habit of doing so. After having inquired for Aramis, he had looked for him in every direction until he had succeeded in finding him. Now, no sooner had the king entered Vaux than Aramis had retired to his own room, meditating doubtless some new piece of gallant attention for his Majesty's amusement. D'Artagnan desired the servants to announce him, and found on the second story, in a beautiful room called the blue room on account of the colour of its hangings, the Bishop of Vannes in company with Porthos and several of the modern Epicureans. Aramis came forward to embrace his friend, and offered him the best seat. As it was after a while generally remarked among those present that the musketeer was reserved, apparently wishing for an opportunity to converse privately with Aramis, the Epicureans took their leave. Porthos, however, did not stir; having dined exceedingly well, he was fast asleep in his arm-chair, and the freedom of conversation therefore was not interrupted by a third person. Porthos had a deep, harmonious snore; and people might talk in the midst of its loud bass without fear of disturbing him.

D'Artagnan felt that he was called upon to open the conversation. The encounter he had come to seek would be rough; so he delicately approached the subject. "Well, and so we have come to Vaux," he said.—"Why, yes, D'Artagnan. And how do you like the place?"—"Very much; and I like M. Fouquet also."—"Is he not a charming host?"—"No one could be more so."

"I am told that the king began by being very distant in his manner towards M. Fouquet, but that his Majesty became much more cordial afterwards."—"You did not notice it, then, since

Digitized by Google

you say you have been told so? "—"No; I was engaged with those gentlemen who have just left the room about the theatrical performances and the tournament which are to take place to-morrow."

"Ah, indeed! you are the comptroller-general of the *fêtes* here, then? "—"You know I am a friend of all kinds of amusement where the exercise of the imagination is required; I have always been a poet in one way or another."—"Yes, I remember the verses you used to write; they were charming."—"I have forgotten them; but I am delighted to read the verses of others, when those others are known by the names of Molière, Pellisson, La Fontaine, etc."

"Do you know what idea occurred to me this evening, Aramis? "—"No; tell me what it was, for I should never be able to guess it, you have so many."—"Well, the idea occurred to me that the true king of France is not Louis XIV."—"What!" said Aramis, involuntarily, looking the musketeer full in the eyes.

"No; it is M. Fouquet." Aramis breathed again, and smiled. "Ah! you are like all the rest,—jealous," he said. "I would wager that it was M. Colbert who turned that pretty phrase."

D'Artagnan, in order to throw Aramis off his guard, related Colbert's misadventures with regard to the *vin de Melun*. "He comes of a mean race, does Colbert," said Aramis.—"Quite true."

"When I think, too," added the bishop, "that that fellow will be your minister within four months, and that you will serve him as blindly as you did Richelieu or Mazarin—"—"And as you serve M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan.

"With this difference, though, that M. Fouquet is not M. Colbert."—"True, true," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to become sad and full of reflection; and then, a moment after, he added, "Why do you tell me that M. Colbert will be minister in four months? "—"Because M. Fouquet will have ceased to be so," replied Aramis.—"He will be ruined, you mean? " said D'Artagnan.—"Completely so."

"Why does he give these *fêtes*, then? " said the musketeer, in a tone so full of thoughtful consideration, so natural, that the bishop was for the moment deceived by it. "Why did you not dissuade him from it? " The latter part of the sentence was just a little too much, and Aramis's former suspicions were again aroused. "It is done with the object of humouring the

king."—"By ruining himself?"—"Yes, by ruining himself for the king."—"A singular calculation that!"—"Necessity."—"I don't see that, dear Aramis."

"Do you not? Have you not remarked M. Colbert's daily increasing antagonism, and that he is doing his utmost to drive the king to get rid of the superintendent?"—"One must be blind not to see it."—"And that a cabal is formed against M. Fouquet?"—"That is well known."—"What likelihood is there that the king would join a party formed against a man who will have spent everything he had to please him?"

"True, true," said D'Artagnan slowly, hardly convinced, yet curious to broach another phase of the conversation. "There are follies and follies," he resumed; "and I do not like those you are committing."—"To what do you allude?"—"As for the banquet, the ball, the concert, the theatricals, the tournaments, the cascades, the fireworks, the illuminations, and the presents,—these are all well and good, I grant; but why were not these expenses sufficient? Was it necessary to refurnish the entire house?"

"You are quite right. I told M. Fouquet that myself. He replied, that if he were rich enough he would offer the king a château new from the vanes at the top of the house to the very cellar, completely new inside and out; and that as soon as the king had left, he would burn the whole building and its contents, in order that it might not be made use of by any one else."—"How completely Spanish!"—"I told him so, and he then added this: 'Whoever advises me to spare expense, I shall look upon as my enemy.'"

"It is positive madness; and that portrait too!"—"What portrait?" said Aramis.—"That of the king; that surprise."—"That surprise?"—"Yes, for which you procured some samples at Percerin's." D'Artagnan paused. The shaft was discharged, and all he had to do was to wait and watch its effect. "That is merely an act of graceful attention," replied Aramis.

D'Artagnan went up to his friend, took hold of both his hands, and looking him full in the eyes said, "Aramis, do you still care for me a little?"—"What a question to ask!"—"Very good. One favour, then. Why did you take some samples of the king's costumes at Percerin's?"—"Come with me and ask poor Lebrun, who has been working upon them for the last two days and two nights."—"Aramis, that may be the truth for everybody else; but for me—"—"Upon my word, D'Artagnan, you astonish me."

Digitized by Google

"Be a little considerate for me. Tell me the exact truth; you would not like anything disagreeable to happen to me, would you?"—"My dear friend, you are becoming quite incomprehensible. What devil of a suspicion have you, then?"—"Do you believe in my instincts? Formerly you had faith in them. Well, then, an instinct tells me that you have some concealed project on foot."—"I—a project?"—"I am not sure of it."—"What nonsense!"—"I am not sure of it, but I would swear to it."

"Indeed, D'Artagnan, you cause me the greatest pain. Is it likely, if I have any project in hand that I ought to keep secret from you, I shall tell you about it? If I had one that I ought to reveal to you, I should have already told it to you."—"No, Aramis, no. There are certain projects which are never revealed until the favourable opportunity arrives."—"In that case, my dear fellow," returned the bishop, laughing, "the only thing now is, that the 'opportunity' has not yet arrived."

D'Artagnan shook his head with a sorrowful expression. "Oh, friendship, friendship!" he said, "what an idle word! Here is a man who, if I were but to ask it, would suffer himself to be cut in pieces for my sake."—"You are right," said Aramis, nobly.—"And this man, who would shed every drop of blood in his veins for me, will not open the smallest corner of his heart. Friendship, I repeat, is nothing but a shadow and a delusion, like everything else that shines in this world."—"It is not thus you should speak of our friendship," replied the bishop, in a firm, assured voice; "for ours is not of the same nature as those of which you have been speaking!"

"Look at us, Aramis! We are three out of the four. You are deceiving me, I suspect you, and Porthos sleeps; an admirable trio of friends, don't you think so?—a beautiful relic!"—"I can only tell you one thing, D'Artagnan, and I swear it on the Bible: I love you just as much as formerly. If ever I distrust you, it is on account of others, and not on account of either of us. In everything I may do and succeed in, you will find your share. Will you promise me the same favour?"

"If I am not mistaken, Aramis, these words of yours, at the moment you pronounce them, are full of generous intention."—"That is true."—"You are conspiring against M. Colbert. If that be all, *mordioux!* tell me so at once. I have the instrument, and will pull out the tooth."

Aramis could not restrain a smile of disdain which passed across his noble features. "And supposing that I were con-

spiring against Colbert, what harm would there be in that?" —"No, no; that would be too trifling a matter for you to take in hand, and it was not on that account you asked Percerin for those samples of the king's costumes. Oh, Aramis, we are not enemies, we are brothers! Tell me what you wish to undertake, and, upon the word of D'Artagnan, if I cannot help you, I will swear to remain neutral."—"I am undertaking nothing," said Aramis.

"Aramis, a voice speaks within me, and seems to enlighten my darkness; it is a voice which has never yet deceived me. It is the king you are conspiring against."—"The king!" exclaimed the bishop, pretending to be annoyed.—"Your face will not convince me. The king, I repeat."

"Will you help me?" said Aramis, smiling ironically.—"Aramis, I will do more than help you,—I will do more than remain neutral,—I will save you."—"You are mad, D'Artagnan."—"I am the wiser of the two, in this matter."—"You to suspect me of wishing to assassinate the king!"—"Who spoke of that at all?" said the musketeer.

"Well, let us understand each other. I do not see what any one can do to a legitimate king as ours is, if he does not assassinate him." D'Artagnan did not say a word. "Besides, you have your guards and your musketeers here," said the bishop. —"True."—"You are not in M. Fouquet's house, but in your own. You have at the present moment M. Colbert, who counsels the king against M. Fouquet all which perhaps you would wish to advise if I were not on his side."—"Aramis! Aramis! for mercy's sake, one word as a friend!"

"A friend's word is the truth itself. If I think of touching, even with my finger, the son of Anne of Austria, the true king of this realm of France; if I have not the firm intention of prostrating myself before his throne; if, according to my wishes, to-morrow here at Vaux will not be the most glorious day my king ever enjoyed,—may Heaven's lightning blast me where I stand!" Aramis had pronounced these words with his face turned towards the alcove of his bedroom, where D'Artagnan, seated with his back towards the alcove, could not suspect that any one was lying concealed. The earnestness of his words, the studied slowness with which he pronounced them, the solemnity of his oath, gave the musketeer the most complete satisfaction. He took hold of both Aramis's hands, and shook them cordially. Aramis had endured reproaches without turning pale; he blushed as he listened to words of

Digitized by Google

praise. D'Artagnan, deceived, did him honour; but D'Artagnan, trustful and reliant, made him feel ashamed. "Are you going away?" he said, as he embraced his friend in order to conceal the flush on his own face.—"Yes; my duty summons me. I have to get the watchword."

"Where are you lodged?"—"In the king's anteroom. And Porthos?"—"Take him away with you if you like, for he snores like a park of artillery."—"Ah! he does not stay with you, then?" said the captain.—"Not at all. He has his room to himself, but I don't know where."

"Very good!" said the musketeer, from whom this separation of the two associates removed his last suspicion; and he touched Porthos roughly on the shoulder. The latter replied by a yawn. "Come!" said D'Artagnan.—"What! D'Artagnan, my dear fellow, is that you? What a lucky chance! Oh, yes,—true; I am at the *fête* at Vaux."—"With your fine suit?"—"Yes; it was very attentive on the part of M. Coquelin de Volière, was it not?"

"Hush!" said Aramis. "You are walking so heavily that you will make the flooring give way."—"True," said the musketeer; "this room is above the dome."—"And I did not choose it for a fencing-room, I assure you," added the bishop. "The ceiling of the king's room has all the sweetness and calm delights of sleep. Do not forget, therefore, that my flooring is merely the covering of his ceiling. Good-night, my friends! In ten minutes I shall be fast asleep;" and Aramis accompanied them to the door, smiling pleasantly.

As soon as they were outside, Aramis bolted the door hurriedly, closed up the chinks of the windows, and then called out, "Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" Philippe made his appearance from the alcove, pushing aside a sliding panel placed behind the bed. "M. d'Artagnan entertains a great many suspicions, it seems," he said.—"Ah! you recognised M. d'Artagnan, then?"—"Before you called him by his name, even."—"He is your captain of musketeers."

"He is very devoted to *me*," replied Philippe, laying a stress upon the personal pronoun.—"As faithful as a dog; but he bites sometimes. If D'Artagnan does not recognise you before *the other* has disappeared, rely upon D'Artagnan to the end of the world; for in that case, if he has seen nothing, he will keep his fidelity. If he sees, when it is too late, he is a Gascon, and will never admit that he has been deceived."

"I thought so. What are we to do, now?"—"You will go

and take up your post at our place of observation, and watch the moment of the king's retiring to rest, so as to learn how that ceremony is performed."—"Very good. Where shall I place myself?"

"Sit down on this folding-chair! I am going to push aside a portion of the flooring; you will look through the opening, which answers to one of the false windows made in the dome of the king's apartment. Can you see?"—"Yes," said Philippe, starting as at the sight of an enemy; "I see the king!"—"What is he doing?"—"He seems to wish some man to sit down close to him."

"M. Fouquet!"—"No, no; wait a moment—"—"The notes, my Prince, the portraits!"—"The man whom the king wishes to sit down in his presence is M. Colbert."

"Colbert sit down in the king's presence!" exclaimed Aramis; "it is impossible."—"Look!" Aramis looked through the opening in the flooring. "Yes," he said, "Colbert himself! Oh, Monseigneur! what are we about to hear, and what can result from this intimacy?"—"Nothing good for M. Fouquet, at all events." The prince was not mistaken.

We have seen that Louis XIV. had sent for Colbert, and that Colbert had arrived. The conversation began between them by the king's according to him one of the highest favours that he had ever given,—it is true that the king was alone with his subject,—"Colbert," said he, "sit down!"

The intendant, overcome with delight, for he had feared he should be dismissed, refused this unprecedented honour. "Does he accept?" said Aramis.—"No; he remains standing."—"Let us listen, then;" and the future king and the future pope listened eagerly to the simple mortals whom they beheld under their feet in a position to crush them if they had liked.

"Colbert," said the king, "you have annoyed me exceedingly to-day."—"I know it, Sire."—"Very good; I like that answer. Yes, you knew it, and there was courage in doing it."—"I ran the risk of displeasing your Majesty, but I risked also concealing what were your true interests from you."—"What! you were afraid of something on my account?"—"I was, Sire, even if it were of nothing more than an indigestion," said Colbert; "for one does not give his king such banquets as that of to-day, except it be to stifle him under the weight of good living."

Colbert awaited the effect of this coarse jest upon the king; and Louis XIV., who was the vainest and the most fastidiously delicate man in his kingdom, forgave Colbert his pleasantry.

"The truth is," he said, "that M. Fouquet has given me too good a meal. Tell me, Colbert, where does he get all the money required for this enormous expenditure,—can you tell?"—"Yes, I know, Sire."—"You will show me?"—"Easily; to the very farthing."

"I know you are very exact."—"It is the principal qualification required in an intendant of finances."—"But all are not so."—"I thank your Majesty for a compliment so flattering from your lips."

"M. Fouquet, then, is rich, very rich; and I suppose every man knows he is so."—"Every one, Sire,—the living as well as the dead."—"What does that mean, M. Colbert?"—"The living are witnesses of M. Fouquet's wealth,—they admire and applaud the result produced; but the dead, wiser than we, know its sources, and they accuse him."—"So that M. Fouquet owes his wealth to certain sources?"—"The occupation of an intendant very often favours those who engage in it."

"You have something to say to me more confidentially, I perceive; do not be afraid, we are quite alone."—"I am never afraid of anything under the shelter of my own conscience and under the protection of your Majesty," said Colbert, bowing.—"If the dead, therefore, were to speak—"—"They do speak sometimes, Sire. Read!"

"Ah!" murmured Aramis in the prince's ear, who close beside him listened without losing a syllable, "since you are placed here, Monseigneur, in order to learn the vocation of a king, listen to a piece of infamy truly royal. You are about to be a witness of one of those scenes which God alone, or rather which the devil alone, can conceive and execute. Listen attentively,—you will find your advantage in it."

The prince redoubled his attention, and saw Louis XIV. take from Colbert's hand a letter which the latter held out to him. "The late cardinal's handwriting," said the king.—"Your Majesty has an excellent memory," replied Colbert, bowing; "it is an immense advantage for a king who is destined for hard work to recognise handwritings at the first glance."

The king read Mazarin's letter; but as its contents are already known to the reader, in consequence of the misunderstanding between Madame de Chevreuse and Aramis, nothing further would be learned if we stated them here again. "I do not quite understand," said the king, greatly interested.

"Your Majesty has not yet acquired the habit of going through the public accounts."—"I see that it refers to money

Digitized by Google

which had been given to M. Fouquet."—"Thirteen millions—a tolerably good sum."—"Yes. Well, and these thirteen millions are wanting to balance the total of the accounts? That is what I do not very well understand. How was this deficit possible?"—"Possible, I do not say; but there is no doubt about its reality."

"You say that these thirteen millions are found to be wanting in the accounts?"—"I do not say so; but the registry does."—"And this letter of M. Mazarin indicates the employment of that sum, and the name of the person with whom it was deposited?"—"As your Majesty can judge for yourself."

"Yes; and the result is, then, that M. Fouquet has not yet restored the thirteen millions."—"That results from the accounts, certainly, Sire."—"Well, and consequently—"—"Well, Sire, consequently, inasmuch as M. Fouquet has not given back the thirteen millions, he must have appropriated them to his own purposes; and with those thirteen millions one could incur four times and a fraction as much expense and display as your Majesty was able to do at Fontainebleau, where we spent only three millions altogether, if you remember."

For a blunderer, the souvenir he had evoked was a very skilfully contrived piece of baseness; for in remembering his own *fête* the king, thanks to a word of Fouquet, had for the first time perceived its inferiority. Colbert received at Vaux what Fouquet had given him at Fontainebleau; and as a good financier, he returned it with the best possible interest. Having once disposed the king's mind in that way, Colbert had nothing further to accomplish. He perceived it; the king had become gloomy. Colbert awaited the first word from the king's lips with as much impatience as Philippe and Aramis did from their place of observation.

"Are you aware what is the natural consequence of all this, M. Colbert?" said the king, after a few moments' reflection.—"No, Sire, I do not know."—"Well, then, the fact of the appropriation of the thirteen millions, if it can be proved—"—"But it is so already."—"I mean if it were to be declared, M. Colbert."—"I think it will be to-morrow, if your Majesty—"—"Were we not under M. Fouquet's roof, you were going to say, perhaps," replied the king, with something of nobleness in his manner.—"The king is in his own palace wherever he may be, and especially in houses for which his own money has paid."

"I think," said Philippe, in a low tone to Aramis, "that the architect who constructed this dome ought, anticipating what

use could be made of it, so to have contrived that it might easily be made to fall on the heads of scoundrels such as that M. Colbert."—"I thought so, too," replied Aramis; "but M. Colbert is so very near the king at this moment."—"That is true, and that would open the succession."—"Of which your younger brother would reap all the advantage, Monseigneur. But, stay! let us keep quiet and listen."

"We shall not have long to listen," said the young prince.—"Why not, Monseigneur?"—"Because, if I were the king, I should not say anything further."—"And what would you do?"—"I should wait until to-morrow morning to give myself time for reflection."

Louis XIV. at last raised his eyes, and finding Colbert attentively waiting for his next remark, said, hastily changing the conversation, "M. Colbert, I perceive it is getting very late, and I shall now retire to bed."—"Ah!" said Colbert, "I should have—"—"Till to-morrow. By to-morrow morning I shall have made up my mind."—"Very good, Sire," returned Colbert, greatly incensed, although he restrained himself in the presence of the king. The king made a gesture of adieu, and Colbert withdrew with a respectful bow. "My attendants!" cried the king; and they entered the apartment.

Philippe was about to quit his post of observation. "A moment longer," said Aramis to him, with his accustomed gentleness of manner. "What has just now taken place is only a detail, and to-morrow we shall have no occasion to think anything more about it; but the ceremony of the king's retiring to rest, the etiquette observed in undressing the king,—that, indeed, is important. Learn, Sire, and study well how you ought to go to bed. Look, look!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXI

COLBERT

History will tell us, or rather history has told us, of the various events of the following day,—of the splendid *fêtes* given by the superintendent to his sovereign. There was nothing but amusement and delight throughout the whole of the following day: there was a promenade, a banquet, a comedy, in which to his great amazement Porthos recognised "M. Coquelin de Volière" as one of the actors, in the piece called "Les Fâcheux."

Full of preoccupation after the scene of the previous evening, and hardly recovered from the effects of the poison which Colbert had then administered to him, the king during the whole of the day, so brilliant in its effects, so full of unexpected and startling novelties, in which all the wonders of the *Arabian Nights*' *Entertainment* seemed to be reproduced for his especial amusement,—the king, we say, showed himself cold, reserved, and taciturn. Nothing could smooth the frowns upon his face; every one who observed him noticed that a deep feeling of resentment, of remote origin, increased by slow degrees, as the source becomes a river, thanks to the thousand threads of water which increase its body, was keenly alive in the depths of the king's heart. Towards the middle of the day only did he begin to resume a little serenity of manner; by that time he had, in all probability, made up his mind. Aramis, who followed him step by step in his thoughts as in his walk, concluded that the event which he was expecting would soon occur. This time Colbert seemed to walk in concert with the Bishop of Vannes; and had he received for every annoyance which he inflicted on the king a word of direction from Aramis, he could not have done better. During the whole of the day the king, who in all probability wished to free himself from some of the thoughts which disturbed his mind, seemed to seek La Vallière's society as actively as he sought to avoid that of M. Colbert or M. Fouquet.

The evening came. The king had expressed a wish not to walk in the park until after cards in the evening. In the interval between supper and the promenade, cards and dice were introduced. The king won a thousand pistoles, and having won them put them in his pocket, and then rose, saying, "And now, gentlemen, to the park." He found the ladies of the

Digitized by Google

court already there. The king, we have before observed, had won a thousand pistoles, and had put them in his pocket. But M. Fouquet had somehow contrived to lose ten thousand; so that among the courtiers there was still left a hundred and ninety thousand livres' profit to divide,—a circumstance which made the countenances of the courtiers and the officers of the king's household the most joyous in the world. It was not the same, however, with the king's face; for notwithstanding his success at play, to which he was by no means insensible, there still remained a slight shade of dissatisfaction.

Colbert was waiting for him at the corner of one of the avenues; he was most probably waiting there by appointment, as Louis XIV., who had avoided him or who had seemed to avoid him, suddenly made him a sign, and they then struck into the depths of the park together. But La Vallière, too, had observed the king's gloomy aspect and kindling glances. She had remarked this; and as nothing which lay hidden or smouldering in his heart was impenetrable to her affection, she understood that this repressed wrath menaced some one. She put herself upon the road of vengeance, like an angel of mercy. Overcome by sadness, nervously agitated, deeply distressed at having been so long separated from her lover, disturbed at the sight of that emotion which she had divined, she presented herself to the king with an embarrassed aspect, which in his evil mood the king interpreted unfavourably. Then, as they were alone, or nearly alone,—inasmuch as Colbert, as soon as he perceived the young girl approaching, had stopped and drawn back a dozen paces,—the king advanced towards La Vallière and took her by the hand. "Mademoiselle," he said to her, "should I be guilty of an indiscretion if I were to inquire if you are indisposed? You seem to breathe as if you were distressed, and your eyes are filled with tears."

"Oh, Sire, if I am distressed, and if my eyes are full of tears, it is for the sadness of your Majesty."—"My sadness? You are mistaken, Mademoiselle; no, it is not sadness I experience."—"What is it, then, Sire?"—"Humiliation."

"Humiliation? Oh, Sire, what a word for you to use!"—"I mean, Mademoiselle, that wherever I may happen to be, no one else ought to be the master. Well, then, look round you on every side, and judge whether, I am not eclipsed—I, the King of France—before the king of these wide domains. Oh!" he continued, clinching his hands and teeth, "when I think that this king—"—"Well, Sire?" said Louise, terrified.—"That

this king is a faithless, unworthy servant, who becomes proud with my stolen property— And therefore am I about to change this impudent minister's *fête* into a sorrow and mourning of which the nymph of Vaux, as the poets say, shall not soon lose the remembrance."

"Oh! your Majesty—"—"Well, Mademoiselle, are you about to take M. Fouquet's part?" said Louis, impatiently.—"No, Sire; I will only ask whether you are well informed. Your Majesty has more than once learned the value of accusations made at court." Louis XIV. made a sign for Colbert to approach. "Speak, M. Colbert," said the young king; "for I almost believe that Mademoiselle de la Vallière has need of your assurance before she can put any faith in the king's word. Tell Mademoiselle what M. Fouquet has done; and you, Mademoiselle, will perhaps have the kindness to listen. It will not be long."

Why did Louis XIV. insist upon it in such a manner? For a very simple reason,—his heart was not at rest; his mind was not thoroughly convinced; he imagined there was some dark, hidden, tortuous intrigue concealed beneath these thirteen million livres; and he wished that the pure heart of La Vallière, which had revolted at the idea of a theft or robbery, should approve, even were it only by a single word, the resolution which he had taken, and which, nevertheless, he hesitated about carrying into execution. "Speak, Monsieur," said La Vallière to Colbert, who had advanced; "speak, since the king wishes me to listen to you. Tell me, what is the crime with which M. Fouquet is charged?"—"Oh, not very heinous, Mademoiselle," he returned,—"a simple abuse of confidence."

"Speak, speak, Colbert; and when you shall have related it, leave us, and go and inform M. d'Artagnan that I have orders to give him."—"M. d'Artagnan, Sire!" exclaimed La Vallière; "but why send for M. d'Artagnan? I entreat you to tell me."—"*Pardieu!* in order to arrest this haughty Titan, who, true to his motto, threatens to scale my heaven."

"Arrest M. Fouquet, do you say?"—"Ah! does that surprise you?"—"In his own house?"—"Why not? If he be guilty, he is guilty in his own house as anywhere else."—"M. Fouquet, who at this moment is ruining himself for his sovereign!"—"I believe, Mademoiselle, you are defending this traitor!"

Colbert began to chuckle silently. The king turned round at the sound of this suppressed mirth. "Sire," said La Vallière,

"it is not M. Fouquet I am defending; it is yourself."—"Me! you defend me?"—"Sire, you would be dishonouring yourself if you were to give such an order."—"Dishonour myself?" murmured the king, turning pale with anger. "In truth, Mademoiselle, you put a strange eagerness into what you say."—"I put eagerness not into what I say, but into serving your Majesty," replied the noble-hearted girl; "in that I would lay down my life, were it needed, and with the same eagerness, Sire."

Colbert seemed inclined to grumble. La Vallière, that gentle lamb, turned round upon him, and with a glance like lightning imposed silence upon him. "Monsieur," she said, "when the king acts well, if in doing so he does either myself or those who belong to me an injury, I have nothing to say; but were the king to confer a benefit either upon me or mine, and if he acted badly, I should tell him so."

"But it appears to me, Mademoiselle," Colbert ventured to say, "that I too love the king."—"Yes, Monsieur, we both love him, but each in a different manner," replied La Vallière, with such an accent that the heart of the young king was powerfully affected by it. "I love him so deeply that the whole world is aware of it, so purely that the king himself does not doubt my love. He is my king and my master; I am the humblest of his servants. But he who touches his honour touches my life. Now, I repeat that they dishonour the king who advise him to arrest M. Fouquet under his own roof."

Colbert hung down his head, for he felt that the king had abandoned him. However, as he bent his head, he murmured, "Mademoiselle, I have only one word to say."—"Do not say it, then, Monsieur; for I would not listen to it. Besides, what could you have to tell me? That M. Fouquet has been guilty of certain crimes? I know he has, because the king has said so; and from the moment the king said, 'I believe,' I have no occasion for other lips to say, 'I affirm.' But were M. Fouquet the vilest of men, I should say aloud, 'M. Fouquet's person is sacred to the king because he is the king's host. Were his house a den of thieves, were Vaux a cave of coiners or robbers, his home is sacred, his palace is inviolable, since his wife is living in it; and it is an asylum which even executioners would not dare to violate.'"

La Vallière paused, and was silent. In spite of himself, the king could not but admire her; he was overpowered by the passionate energy of her voice, by the nobleness of the cause

she advocated. Colbert yielded, overcome by the inequality of the struggle. At last the king breathed again more freely, shook his head, and held out his hand to La Vallière. "Mademoiselle," he said gently, "why do you decide against me? Do you know what this wretched fellow will do, if I give him time to breathe again?"

"Is he not a prey which will always be within your grasp?" —"And if he escapes, and takes to flight?" exclaimed Colbert. —"Well, Monsieur, it will always remain on record, to the king's eternal honour, that he allowed M. Fouquet to flee; and the more guilty he may have been, the greater will the king's honour and glory appear, when compared with such misery and such shame."

Louis kissed La Vallière's hand, as he knelt before her. "I am lost!" thought Colbert; then suddenly his face brightened up again. "Oh, no, no, not yet!" he said to himself. And while the king, protected from observation by the thick covert of an enormous lime, pressed La Vallière to his breast with all the ardour of ineffable affection, Colbert tranquilly looked among the papers in his pocket-book, and drew out of it a paper folded in the form of a letter, slightly yellow, perhaps, but which must have been very precious, since the intendant smiled as he looked at it; he then bent a look full of hatred upon the charming group which the young girl and the king formed together,—a group which was revealed for a moment as the light of the approaching torches shone upon it.

Louis noticed the light reflected upon La Vallière's white dress. "Leave me, Louise," he said, "for some one is coming." —"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, some one is coming," cried Colbert, to expedite the young girl's departure.

Louise disappeared rapidly among the trees; and then, as the king, who had been on his knees before the young girl, was rising from his humble posture, Colbert exclaimed, "Ah! Mademoiselle de la Vallière has let something fall."—"What is it?" inquired the king.—"A paper,—a letter,—something white; look there, Sire!" The king stooped down immediately, and picked up the letter, crumpling it in his hand as he did so; and at the same moment the torches arrived, inundating the darkness of the scene with a flood of light as bright as day.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXII

JEALOUSY

THE torches to which we have just referred, the eager attention which every one displayed, and the new ovation paid to the king by Fouquet arrived in time to suspend the effect of a resolution which La Vallière had already considerably shaken in Louis XIV.'s heart. He looked at Fouquet with a feeling almost of gratitude for having given La Vallière an opportunity of showing herself so generously disposed, so powerful in the influence she exercised over his heart. The moment of the last and greatest display had arrived. Hardly had Fouquet conducted the king towards the château, when a mass of fire burst from the dome of Vaux with a prodigious uproar, pouring a flood of dazzling light on every side, and illumining the remotest corner of the gardens. The fireworks began. Colbert, at twenty paces from the king, who was surrounded and *fêted* by the masters of Vaux, seemed, by the obstinate persistence of his gloomy thoughts, to do his utmost to recall Louis's attention, which the magnificence of the spectacle was already, in his opinion, too easily diverting.

Suddenly, just as Louis was on the point of holding his hand out to Fouquet, he perceived in it the paper which, as he believed, La Vallière had dropped at his feet as she hurried away. The still stronger magnet of love drew the young king's attention to the souvenir of his idol; and by the brilliant light, which increased momentarily in beauty, and drew forth from the neighbouring villages loud exclamations of admiration, the king read the letter, which he supposed was a loving and tender epistle that La Vallière had destined for him. But as he read it, a deathlike pallor stole over his face, and an expression of deep-seated wrath, illumined by the many-coloured fires, produced a terrible spectacle, which every one would have shuddered at, could they only have read his heart, which was torn by the most stormy passions. For him there was no more truce with jealousy and rage. From the moment when the dark truth was revealed to him, every gentler feeling disappeared,—piety, kindness, the religion of hospitality. In the bitter pang which wrung his heart, still too weak to hide his sufferings, he was almost on the point of uttering a cry of alarm, and calling

his guards to gather round him. This letter which Colbert had thrown down at the king's feet, the reader has doubtless guessed, was the same that had disappeared with the porter Toby, at Fontainebleau, after the attempt which Fouquet had made upon La Vallière's heart. Fouquet saw the king's pallor, and was far from guessing the evil. Colbert saw the king's anger, and rejoiced inwardly at the approach of the storm.

Fouquet's voice drew the young king from his wrathful reverie. "What is the matter, Sire?" inquired the superintendent, with an expression of graceful interest. Louis made a violent effort over himself, as he replied, "Nothing."—"I am afraid your Majesty is suffering?"

"I am suffering, and have already told you so, Monsieur; but it is nothing." The king, without waiting for the termination of the fireworks, turned towards the château. Fouquet accompanied him; and the whole court followed them, leaving the remains of the fireworks burning for their own amusement. The superintendent endeavoured again to question Louis XIV., but obtained no reply. He imagined that there had been some misunderstanding between Louis and La Vallière in the park, which had resulted in a slight quarrel; and that the king, who was not ordinarily sulky by disposition, but completely absorbed by his passion for La Vallière, had taken a dislike to every one because his mistress had shown herself offended with him. This idea was sufficient to reassure him; he had even a friendly and kindly smile for the young king, when the latter wished him good-night. This, however, was not all the king had to submit to; he was obliged to undergo the usual ceremony, which on that evening was marked by the closest adherence to the strictest etiquette. The next day was the one fixed for the departure; it was but proper that the guests should thank their host, and should show him a little attention in return for the expenditure of his twelve millions. The only remark approaching to amiability which the king could find to say to Fouquet, as he took leave of him, was in these words: "M. Fouquet, you shall hear from me. Be good enough to desire M. d'Artagnan to come here!"

The blood of Louis XIV., who had so profoundly dissimulated his feelings, boiled in his veins; he was perfectly ready to get Fouquet's throat cut, as his predecessor had caused the assassination of the Maréchal d'Ancre. He concealed, beneath one of those royal smiles which are the lightning flashes to the thunderbolts of the State, the terrible resolution he had formed.

Fouquet took the king's hand, and kissed it. Louis shuddered throughout his whole frame, but allowed Fouquet to touch his hand with his lips.

Five minutes afterwards, D'Artagnan, to whom the royal order had been communicated, entered Louis XIV.'s apartment. Aramis and Philippe were in theirs, still eagerly attentive and still listening. The king did not even give the captain of the musketeers time to approach his arm-chair, but ran forward to meet him. "Take care," he exclaimed, "that no one enters here!"—"Very good, Sire," replied the captain, whose glance had for a long time past analysed the ravages on the king's countenance. He gave the necessary order at the door; but returning to the king he said, "Is there some new trouble, your Majesty?"

"How many men have you here?" said the king, without making other reply to the question addressed to him.—"What for, Sire?"—"How many men have you, I say?" repeated the king, stamping upon the ground with his foot.—"I have the musketeers."

"Well; and what others?"—"Twenty guards and thirteen Swiss."—"How many men will be required to—"—"To do what, Sire?" replied the musketeer, opening his large, calm eyes.—"To arrest M. Fouquet."

D'Artagnan fell back a step. "To arrest M. Fouquet!" he burst forth.—"Are you going to tell me that it is impossible?" exclaimed the king, with cold and vindictive passion.—"I never said that anything is impossible," replied D'Artagnan, wounded to the quick.—"Very well; do it, then."

D'Artagnan turned on his heel, and made his way towards the door,—it was but a short distance, and he cleared it in half a dozen paces. When he reached it he suddenly paused, and said, "Your Majesty will forgive me; but in order to effect this arrest I should like written directions."—"For what purpose? and since when has the king's word been insufficient for you?"—"Because the word of a king when it springs from a feeling of anger may possibly change when the feeling changes."

"No more phrases, Monsieur; you have another thought besides that?"—"Oh, I always have thoughts; and thoughts which, unfortunately, others have not!" D'Artagnan replied impertinently. The king, in the tempest of his wrath, hesitated, and drew back in the face of that man, just as a horse crouches on his haunches under the strong hand of a rider. "What is your thought?" he exclaimed.—"This, Sire," replied D'Ar-

tagnan: "you cause a man to be arrested when you are still under his roof; and passion is alone the cause of that. When your anger shall have passed away you will regret what you have done; and then I wish to be in a position to show you your signature. If that mends nothing, it will at least show us that the king is wrong to lose his temper."

"Wrong to lose his temper!" shouted the king, with frenzy. "Did not my father, my grandfather too, before me, lose their temper, body of Christ!"—"The king your father and the king your grandfather never lost their temper except in the privacy of their own palace."—"The king is master wherever he may be."—"That is a flattering phrase which cannot proceed from any one but M. Colbert; but it happens not to be the truth. The king is at home in every man's house when he has driven its owner out of it."

The king bit his lips. "Can it be possible?" said D'Artagnan. "Here is a man who is ruining himself in order to please you, and you wish to have him arrested! *Mordioux!* Sire, if my name were Fouquet, and any one treated me in that manner, I would swallow at a single gulp ten pieces of fireworks, and I would set fire to them and blow myself and everybody else up to the sky. But it is all the same; it is your wish, and it shall be done."

"Go!" said the king; "but have you men enough?"—"Do you suppose I am going to take a whole host to help me? To arrest M. Fouquet is so easy that a child might do it! It is like drinking a glass of bitters: one makes an ugly face, and that is all."—"If he defends himself?"—"He! not at all likely. Defend himself when such extreme harshness as you are going to practise makes him king and martyr! Nay, I am sure that if he has a million livres left, which I very much doubt, he would be willing enough to give it in order to have such a termination as this. But what does that matter? It shall be done at once."

"Stay!" said the king; "do not make his arrest a public affair."—"That will be more difficult."—"Why so?"—"Because nothing is easier than to go up to M. Fouquet in the midst of a thousand enthusiastic guests who surround him, and say, 'In the king's name, I arrest you.' But to go up to him, to turn him first one way and then another, to drive him up into one of the corners of the chessboard in such a way that he cannot escape, to take him away from his guests and keep him a prisoner for you without one of them, alas! having heard anything about

it,—that, indeed, is a real difficulty,—the greatest of all, in truth; and I hardly see how it is to be done."

"You had better say it is impossible, and you will have finished much sooner. *Mon Dieu!* I seem to be surrounded by people who prevent my doing what I wish."—"I do not prevent your doing anything. Are you decided?"—"Take care of M. Fouquet until I shall have made up my mind by to-morrow morning."—"That shall be done, Sire."—"And return, when I rise in the morning, for further orders; and now leave me to myself."

"You do not even want M. Colbert, then?" said the musketeer, firing this last shot as he was leaving the room. The king started. With his whole mind fixed on the thought of revenge, he had forgotten the cause and substance of the offence. "No, no one," he said; "no one here. Leave me!"

D'Artagnan quitted the room. The king closed the door with his own hands, and began to walk up and down his apartment at a furious pace, like a wounded bull in an arena who drags after him the coloured streamers and iron darts. At last he began to take comfort in the expression of his violent feelings. "Miserable wretch that he is! not only does he squander my finances, but with his ill-gotten plunder he corrupts secretaries, friends, generals, artists, and all; he even takes from me my mistress. Ah, that is the reason why that perfidious girl so boldly took his part! Gratitude! and who can tell whether it was not a stronger feeling,—love itself?" He gave himself up for a moment to his bitter reflections. "A satyr!" he thought, with that abhorrent hate with which young men regard those more advanced in life, who still think of love. "A faun who pursues a course of gallantry and has never met resistance; a man for silly women, who lavishes his gold and jewels in every direction, and who retains his staff of painters in order to take the portraits of his mistresses in the costume of goddesses!" The king trembled with passion as he continued: "He pollutes and profanes everything that belongs to me; he destroys everything that is mine; he will be my death at last! That man is too much for me; he is my mortal enemy, and he shall fall! I hate him,—I hate him,—I hate him!" and as he pronounced these words, he struck the arm of the chair in which he was sitting, violently over and over again, and then rose, like one in an epileptic fit. "To-morrow! to-morrow! oh, happy day!" he murmured; "when the sun rises, no other rival will that bright orb have but me. That man shall fall so low that when

people look at the utter ruin which my anger shall have wrought, they will be forced to confess, at least, that I am indeed greater than he."

The king, who was incapable of mastering his emotions any longer, knocked over with a blow of his fist a small table placed close to his bedside, and in the bitterness of feeling from which he was suffering, almost weeping, and half suffocated by his passion, threw himself on his bed, dressed as he was, and bit the sheets in the extremity of his emotion, trying there to find at least repose of body. The bed creaked beneath his weight; and with the exception of a few broken sounds which escaped from his overburdened chest, absolute silence soon reigned in the chamber of Morpheus.

CHAPTER CCXXIII

HIGH TREASON

The ungovernable fury which took possession of the king at the sight and at the perusal of Fouquet's letter to La Vallière by degrees subsided into a feeling of painful weariness. Youth, full of health and life, and requiring that what it loses should be immediately restored,—youth knows not those endless, sleepless nights which realise to the unhappy the fable of the liver of Prometheus, unceasingly renewed. In instances where the man of middle life in his acquired strength of will and purpose, and the old man in his state of exhaustion find an incessant renewal of their sorrow, a young man, surprised by the sudden appearance of a misfortune, weakens himself in sighs and groans and tears, in direct struggles with it, and is thereby far sooner overthrown by the inflexible enemy with whom he is engaged. Once overthrown, his sufferings cease. Louis was conquered in a quarter of an hour. Then he ceased to clinch his hands, and to burn with his looks the invisible objects of his hatred; he ceased to attack with violent imprecations M. Fouquet and La Vallière: from fury he subsided into despair, and from despair to prostration. After he had thrown himself for a few minutes to and fro convulsively on his bed, his nerveless arms fell quietly down; his head lay languidly on his pillow; his limbs, exhausted by his excessive emotions, still trembled occasionally, agitated by slight muscular contractions; and from his breast only faint and unfrequent sighs still issued.

Digitized by Google

Morpheus, the tutelary deity of the apartment which bore his name, towards whom Louis raised his eyes, wearied by his anger and reddened by his tears, showered down upon him copiously the sleep-inducing poppies, so that the king gently closed his eyes and fell asleep. Then it seemed to him, as it often happens in that first sleep, so light and gentle, which raises the body above the couch, the soul above the earth,—it seemed to him as if the god Morpheus, painted on the ceiling, looked at him with eyes quite human; that something shone brightly, and moved to and fro in the dome above the sleeper; that the crowd of terrible dreams, moving off for an instant, left uncovered a human face, with a hand resting against the mouth, and in an attitude of deep and absorbed meditation. And strange enough, too, this man bore so wonderful a resemblance to the king himself, that Louis fancied he was looking at his own face reflected in a mirror; only, that face was saddened by a feeling of the profoundest pity. Then it seemed to him as if the dome gradually retired, escaping from his gaze, and that the figures and attributes painted by Lebrun became darker and darker as the distance became more and more remote. A gentle, easy movement, as regular as that by which a vessel plunges beneath the waves, had succeeded to the immovableness of the bed. Doubtless the king was dreaming; and in this dream the crown of gold which fastened the curtains together seemed to recede from his vision, just as the dome, to which it remained suspended, had done; so that the winged genius which with both its hands supported the crown seemed, though vainly so, to call upon the king, who was fast disappearing from it. The bed still sank. Louis, with his eyes open, could not resist the deception of this cruel hallucination. At last, as the light of the royal chamber faded away into darkness and gloom, something cold, gloomy, and inexplicable seemed to infect the air. No paintings, nor gold, nor velvet hangings were visible any longer,—nothing but walls of a dull grey colour, which the increasing gloom made darker every moment. And yet the bed still continued to descend; and after a minute, which seemed in its duration almost an age to the king, it reached a stratum of air black and still as death, and then it stopped. The king could no longer see the light in his room, except as from the bottom of a well we can see the light of day. "I am under the influence of a terrible dream," he thought. "It is time to arouse myself. Come, let us wake up!"

Digitized by Google

Every one has experienced what the above remark conveys;

there is no one who in the midst of a suffocating nightmare has not said to himself, by the help of that light which still burns in the brain when every human light is extinguished, "It is nothing but a dream, after all." This was precisely what Louis XIV. said to himself. But when he said, "Let us wake up," he perceived that not only was he already awake, but still more that he had his eyes open also. He then looked around him. On his right hand and on his left two armed men stood silently, each wrapped in a huge cloak, and the face covered with a mask; one of them held a small lamp in his hand, whose glimmering light revealed the saddest picture a king could look upon.

Louis said to himself that his dream still lasted, and that all he had to do to cause it to disappear was to move his arms or to say something aloud. He darted from his bed, and found himself upon the damp ground. Then, addressing himself to the man who held the lamp in his hand, he said, "What is this, Monsieur, and what is the meaning of this jest?"—"It is no jest," replied, in a deep voice, the masked figure that held the lantern.

"Do you belong to M. Fouquet?" inquired the king, greatly astonished at his situation.—"It matters very little to whom we belong," said the phantom. "We are your masters; that is sufficient." The king, more impatient than intimidated, turned to the other masked figure. "If this is a comedy," he said, "you will tell M. Fouquet that I find it unseemly, and that I desire it should cease."

The second masked person to whom the king had addressed himself was a man of huge stature and vast circumference. He held himself erect and motionless as a block of marble. "Well," added the king, stamping his foot, "you do not answer!"—"We do not answer you, my good Monsieur," said the giant, in a stentorian voice, "because there is nothing to answer, except that you are the chief *fâcheux*, and that M. Coquelin de Volière forgot to include you in the number of his."

"At least, tell me what you want!" exclaimed Louis, folding his arms with a passionate gesture.—"You will know by and by," replied the man who held the lamp.—"In the meantime tell me where I am."—"Look!"

Louis looked all round him; but by the light of the lamp which the masked figure raised for the purpose, he could perceive nothing but the damp walls, which glistened here and there with the slimy traces of the snail. "Oh! oh! a dungeon," said the king.—"No, a subterranean passage."—"Which leads—"—

"Will you be good enough to follow us?"—"I shall not stir from hence!" cried the king.

"If you are obstinate, my dear young friend," replied the taller and stouter of the two, "I will lift you up in my arms, will roll you up in a cloak, and if you are stifled there, why, so much the worse for you!" and as he said this he disengaged from beneath the cloak with which he had threatened the king a hand of which Milo of Crotona would have envied him the possession on the day when he had that unhappy idea of rending his last oak.

The king dreaded violence; for he could well believe that the two men into whose power he had fallen had not gone so far with any idea of drawing back, and that they would consequently be ready to proceed to extremities if necessary. He shook his head, and said: "It seems I have fallen into the hands of a couple of assassins. Move on, then!"

Neither of the men answered a word to this remark. The one who carried the lantern walked first, the king followed him, while the second masked figure closed the procession. In this manner they passed along a winding gallery of some length, with as many staircases leading out of it as are to be found in the mysterious and gloomy palace of Ann Radcliffe. All these windings, throughout which the king heard the sound of falling water over his head, ended at last in a long corridor closed by an iron door. The figure with the lamp opened the door with one of the keys he wore suspended at his girdle, where during the whole of the time the king had heard them rattle. As soon as the door was opened and admitted the air, Louis recognised the balmy odours which the trees exhale after a hot summer's day. He paused hesitatingly for a moment or two; but his huge companion who followed him thrust him out of the subterranean passage.

"Another blow!" said the king, turning towards the one who had just had the audacity to touch his sovereign; "what do you intend to do with the King of France?"—"Try to forget that word," replied the man with the lamp, in a tone which as little admitted of reply as one of the famous decrees of Minos.—"You deserve to be broken on the wheel for the word you have just made use of," said the giant, as he extinguished the lamp his companion handed to him; "but the king is too kind-hearted."

Louis, at that threat, made so sudden a movement that it seemed as if he meditated flight; but the giant's hand was

placed on his shoulder, and fixed him motionless where he stood. "But tell me, at least, where we are going," said the king.—"Come!" replied the former of the two men, with a kind of respect in his manner, and leading his prisoner towards a carriage which seemed to be in waiting.

The carriage was completely concealed amid the trees. Two horses, with their feet fettered, were fastened by a halter to the lower branches of a large oak. "Get in," said the same man, opening the carriage door and letting down the step. The king obeyed, seated himself at the back of the carriage, the padded door of which was shut and locked immediately upon him and his guide. As for the giant, he cut the fastenings by which the horses were bound, harnessed them himself, and mounted on the box of the carriage, which was unoccupied. The carriage set off immediately at a quick trot, turned into the road to Paris, and in the forest of Sénart found a relay of horses fastened to the trees in the same manner in which the first horses had been, and without a postilion. The man on the box changed the horses, and continued to follow the road towards Paris with the same rapidity, and entered the city about three o'clock in the morning. The carriage proceeded along the Faubourg St. Antoine, and after having called out to the sentinel, "By the king's order!" the driver conducted the horses into the circular enclosure of the Bastille, looking out upon the courtyard called La Cour du Gouvernement. There the horses drew up, reeking with sweat, at the flight of steps, and a sergeant of the guard ran forward.

"Go and wake the governor!" said the coachman, in a voice of thunder. With the exception of this voice, which might have been heard at the entrance of the Faubourg St. Antoine, everything remained as calm in the carriage as in the prison. Ten minutes afterwards, M. de Baisemeaux appeared in his dressing-gown on the threshold of the door. "What is the matter now?" he asked; "and whom have you brought me there?"

The man with the lantern opened the carriage door, and said two or three words to the one who acted as driver, who immediately got down from his seat, took up a short musket which he kept under his feet, and placed its muzzle on the prisoner's chest. "Fire at once if he speaks!" added, aloud, the man who alighted from the carriage.—"Very good!" replied his companion, without any other remark.

With this recommendation, the person who had accompanied the king in the carriage ascended the flight of steps, at the top

of which the governor was awaiting him. "M. d'Herblay!" said the latter.

"Hush!" said Aramis; "let us go into your room."—"Good heavens! what brings you here at this hour?"—"A mistake, my dear M. de Baisemeaux," Aramis replied quietly. "It appears that you were quite right the other day."—"What about?" inquired the governor.—"About the order of release, my dear friend."

"Tell me what you mean, Monsieur,—no, Monseigneur," said the governor, almost suffocated by surprise and terror.—"It is a very simple affair. You remember, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that an order of release was sent to you?"—"Yes, for Marchiali."—"Very good! we both thought that it was for Marchiali?"—"Certainly. You will recollect, however, that I did not believe it; that I was unwilling; that you compelled me."

"Oh, Baisemeaux, my good fellow, what a word to make use of!—advised, that was all."—"Advised,—yes, advised me to give him up to you; and that you carried him off with you in your carriage."—"Well, my dear M. de Baisemeaux, it was a mistake. It was discovered at the Ministry; so that I now bring you an order from the king to set at liberty Seldon,—that poor devil of a Scotchman, you know."

"Seldon! are you sure this time?"—"Well, read it yourself," added Aramis, handing him the order.—"Why," said Baisemeaux, "this order is the very same that has already passed through my hands."—"Indeed?"—"It is the very one I assured you I saw the other evening. *Parbleu!* I recognise it by the blot of ink."

"I do not know whether it is that; but, at any rate, it is the one I bring you."—"But, then, about the other?"—"What other?"—"Marchiali?"—"I have him here with me."

"But that is not enough for me. I require a new order to take him back again."—"Don't talk such nonsense, my dear Baisemeaux; you talk like a child! Where is the order you received respecting Marchiali?" Baisemeaux ran to his iron chest and took it out. Aramis seized hold of it, coolly tore it in four pieces, held them to the lamp, and burned them. "Good heavens! what are you doing?" exclaimed Baisemeaux, in an extremity of terror.

"Look at your position a little, my dear governor," said Aramis, with his imperturbable self-possession, "and you will see that it is very simple. You no longer possess any order justifying Marchiali's release."—"I am a lost man!"—"Far

from it, my good fellow, since I have brought Marchiali back to you, and it is just the same as if he had never left."—"Ah!" said the governor, completely overcome by terror.

"Plain enough, you see; and you will go and shut him up immediately."—"I should think so, indeed."—"And you will hand over to me this Seldon, whose liberation is authorised by this order. In this way you square your conduct; do you understand?"—"I—I—"—"You do understand, I see," said Aramis. "Very good!"

Baisemeaux clasped his hands together. "But why, at all events, after having taken Marchiali away from me, do you bring him back again?" cried the unhappy governor, in a paroxysm of terror and completely dumfounded.

"For a friend such as you are," said Aramis, "for so devoted a servant, I have no secrets;" and he put his mouth close to Baisemeaux's ear, as he said in a low tone of voice, "you know the resemblance between that unfortunate fellow and—"—"And the king?—yes."—"Very good; the very first use that Marchiali made of his liberty was to pretend— Can you guess what?"—"How is it likely I should guess?"—"To pretend that he was the King of France."—"Oh, the wretch!" cried Baisemeaux.

"To dress himself up in clothes like those of the king, and attempt to play the rôle of usurper."—"Gracious heavens!"—"That is the reason why I have brought him back again, my dear friend. He is mad, and lets every one see how mad he is."

"What is to be done, then?"—"That is very simple; let no one hold any communication with him. You understand that when his peculiar style of madness came to the king's ears, the king, who had pitied his terrible affliction, and saw how his kindness of heart had been repaid by such black ingratitude, became perfectly furious; so that now,—and remember this very distinctly, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for it concerns you most closely,—so that there is now, I repeat, sentence of death pronounced against all those who may allow him to communicate with any one else save me or the king himself. You understand, Baisemeaux,—sentence of death!"—"Do I understand? *Morbleu!*"

"And now go down and conduct this poor devil back to his dungeon again, unless you prefer he should come up here."—"What would be the good of that?"—"It would be better, perhaps, to enter his name in the prison-book at once!"—"*Pardieu!*"—"Well, then, have him up!"

Digitized by Google

Baisemeaux ordered the drums to be beaten and the bell to be rung, as a warning to every one to retire in order to avoid meeting a mysterious prisoner. Then, when the passages were free, he went to take the prisoner from the carriage, at whose breast Porthos, faithful to the directions which had been given him, still kept his musket levelled. "Ah! is that you, miserable wretch?" cried the governor, as soon as he perceived the king. "Very good, very good!" and immediately, making the king get out of the carriage, he led him, still accompanied by Porthos, who had not taken off his mask, and Aramis, who again resumed his, up the stairs, to the second Bertaudière, and opened the door of the room in which Philippe for six long years had bemoaned his existence. The king entered the cell without pronouncing a single word; he was pale and haggard. Baisemeaux shut the door upon him, turned the key twice in the lock, and then returned to Aramis. "It is quite true," he said in a low tone, "that he has a rather strong resemblance to the king, but still less so than you said."—"So that," said Aramis, "you would not have been deceived by the substitution of the one for the other."—"What a question!"

"You are a most valuable fellow, Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and now, set Seldon free!"—"Oh, yes; I was going to forget that. I will go and give orders at once."—"Bah! to-morrow will be time enough."—"To-morrow!—oh, no! This very minute!"

"Well, go off to your affairs! I shall go away to mine. But it is quite understood, is it not?"—"What is 'quite understood'?"—"That no one is to enter the prisoner's cell, except with an order from the king,—an order which I will myself bring."—"That is understood. Adieu, Monseigneur!"

Aramis returned to his companion. "Now, Porthos, my good fellow, back again to Vaux, and as fast as possible!"—"A man is light when he has faithfully served his king, and in serving him saved his country," said Porthos. "The horses will have nothing to draw. Let us be off!" and the carriage, lightened of a prisoner who in fact seemed to Aramis very heavy, passed across the drawbridge of the Bastille, which was raised again immediately behind it.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXIV

A NIGHT IN THE BASTILLE

SUFFERING in human life is proportioned to human strength. We will not pretend to say that God always apportions to a man's capability of endurance the anguish he permits him to suffer; such, indeed, would not be exact, since God permits the existence of death, which is sometimes the only refuge open to those who are too closely pressed,—too bitterly afflicted, so far as the body is concerned. Suffering is proportioned to strength in this sense,—that the weak suffer more, where the trial is the same, than the strong. And what are the elementary principles which compose human strength? Are they not—more than anything else—exercise, habit, experience? We shall not even take the trouble to demonstrate that; it is an axiom in morals as in physics.

When the young king, stupefied, crushed, found himself led to a cell in the Bastille, he fancied at first that death is like sleep, and has its dreams; that the bed had broken through the flooring of his room at Vaux; that death had resulted; and that, still carrying out his dream, Louis XIV., now dead, was dreaming of those horrors, impossible to realise in life, which are termed dethronement, imprisonment, and degradation of a king all-powerful but yesterday. To be a spectator, as palpable phantom, of his own wretched suffering; to float in an incomprehensible mystery between resemblance and reality; to hear everything, to see everything, without confusing the details of that agony,—"was it not," said the king to himself, "a torture the more terrible since it might be eternal?"

"Is this what is termed eternity,—hell?" Louis murmured at the moment the door closed upon him, shut by Baisemeaux himself. He did not even look around him; and in that chamber, leaning with his back against the wall, he allowed himself to be carried away by the terrible supposition that he was already dead, as he closed his eyes in order to avoid looking upon something even worse. "How can I have died?" he said to himself, almost insensible. "Could that bed have been let down by some artificial means? But, no! I do not remember to have received any contusion or any shock. Would

they not rather have poisoned me at one of my meals, or with the fumes of wax, as they did my ancestress Jeanne d'Albret?" Suddenly the chill of the dungeon seemed to fall like a cloak upon Louis's shoulders. "I have seen," he said, "my father lying dead upon his funereal couch, in his regal robes. That pale face, so calm and worn; those hands, once so skilful, lying nerveless by his side; those limbs stiffened by the icy grasp of death,—nothing there betokened a sleep disturbed by dreams. And yet what dreams God might have sent to him,—to him whom so many others had preceded, hurried away by him into eternal death! No, that king was still the king; he was enthroned still upon that funereal couch, as upon a velvet armchair; he had not abdicated aught of his majesty. God, who had not punished him, cannot punish me, who have done nothing."

A strange sound attracted the young man's attention. He looked round him, and saw on the mantel-shelf, just below an enormous crucifix coarsely painted in fresco on the wall, a rat of enormous size engaged in nibbling a piece of dry bread, but fixing all the time an intelligent and inquiring look upon the new occupant of the cell. The king could not resist a sudden impulse of fear and disgust. He moved back towards the door, uttering a loud cry; and as if he but needed this cry, which escaped from his breast almost unconsciously, to recognise himself, Louis knew that he was alive and in full possession of his natural senses. "A prisoner!" he cried. "I—I a prisoner!" He looked round him for a bell to summon some one to him. "There are no bells in the Bastille," he said, "and it is in the Bastille I am imprisoned. In what way can I have been made a prisoner? It is, of course, a conspiracy of M. Fouquet. I have been drawn into a snare at Vaux. M. Fouquet cannot be acting alone in this affair. His agent,—that voice I but just now heard was M. d'Herblay's; I recognised it. Colbert was right, then. But what is Fouquet's object? To reign in my place and stead? Impossible! Yet, who knows?" thought the king, relapsing into gloom. "Perhaps my brother the Duc d'Orléans is doing against me what my uncle, all through his life, wished to do against my father. But the queen?—My mother too? And La Vallière? Oh! La Vallière,—she will have been abandoned to Madame. Dear child!—yes, it is so; they have shut her up, as they have me. We are separated for ever!" and at this idea of separation the lover burst into tears, with sobs and groans.

Digitized by Google

"There is a governor in this place," the king continued, in a fury of passion. "I will speak to him; I will summon him." He called; but no voice replied to his. He seized his chair, and hurled it against the massive oaken door. The wood resounded against the door, and awakened many a mournful echo in the profound depths of the staircase; but no one responded.

This was for the king a fresh proof of the slight regard in which he was held in the Bastille. Therefore, when his first fit of anger had passed away, having noticed a barred window, through which there passed a stream of light, lozenge-shaped, which must be the luminous dawn, Louis began to call out, at first gently, then louder and louder still; but no one replied to him. Twenty other attempts which he made, one after another, obtained no better success. His blood began to boil within him, and mount to his head. His nature was such that, accustomed to command, he trembled at the idea of disobedience. By degrees his anger increased. The prisoner broke the chair, which was too heavy for him to lift, and made use of it as a battering-ram to strike against the door. He struck with such force and rapidity that the perspiration soon began to pour down his face. The sound became tremendous and continuous; stifled cries replied in different directions.

This sound produced a strange effect upon the king; he paused to listen to it. It was the voices of the prisoners,—formerly his victims, now his companions. The voices ascended like vapours through the thick ceilings and the massive walls; they complained against the author of this noise, as doubtless their sighs and tears accused, in whispered tones, the author of their captivity. After having deprived so many persons of their liberty, the king had come among them to rob them of their sleep. This idea almost drove him mad; it redoubled his strength, or rather his will, bent upon obtaining some information or some result. With a portion of the broken chair he recommenced the noise. At the end of an hour Louis heard something in the corridor behind the door of his cell; and a violent blow which was returned upon the door itself made him cease his own.

"Ah, there! are you mad?" said a rude, brutal voice. "What is the matter with you this morning?"—"This morning!" thought the king, surprised; but he said aloud, politely, "Monsieur, are you the governor of the Bastille?"—"My good fellow, your head is out of sorts," replied the voice; "but that

is no reason why you should make such a terrible disturbance. Be quiet, *mordieu!*"

"Are you the governor?" the king inquired again. He heard a door on the corridor close; the jailer had left without condescending to reply. When the king had assured himself of his departure, his fury knew no longer any bounds. As agile as a tiger, he leaped from the table to the window, and shook the iron bars. He broke a pane of glass, the pieces of which fell clanking into the courtyard below. He shouted with increasing hoarseness, "The governor, the governor!" This excess lasted fully an hour, during which time he was in a burning fever. With his hair in disorder and matted on his forehead, his dress torn and whitened, his linen in shreds, the king never rested until his strength was utterly exhausted; and it was not until then that he clearly understood the pitiless thickness of the walls, the impenetrable nature of the cement, invincible to all other influence save that of time, and that he possessed no other weapon but despair. He leaned his forehead against the door, and let the feverish throbbings of his heart calm by degrees; an additional pulsation would have made it burst.

"A moment will come when the food which is given to the prisoners will be brought to me. I shall then see some one; I shall speak to him, and get an answer." Then the king tried to remember at what hour the first repast of the prisoners was served in the Bastille; he was ignorant even of this detail. The feeling of remorse at this remembrance smote him like a keen thrust of a dagger,—that he should have lived for five-and-twenty years a king, and in the enjoyment of every happiness, without having bestowed a moment's thought on the misery of those who had been unjustly deprived of their liberty. The king blushed from shame. He felt that Heaven, in permitting this fearful humiliation, did no more than render to the man the same torture which was inflicted by that man upon so many others. Nothing could be more efficacious toward awakening religious feeling in that soul prostrated by the sense of suffering. But Louis dared not even kneel in prayer to God to entreat him to terminate his bitter trial.

"Heaven is right," he said; "Heaven acts wisely. It would be cowardly to pray to Heaven for that which I have so often refused to my own fellow-creatures." He had reached this stage of his reflections,—that is, of his agony of mind,—when the same noise was again heard behind his door, followed this time by the sound of the key in the lock, and of the bolts with-

drawn from their staples. The king bounded forward to be nearer to the person who was about to enter; but suddenly reflecting that it was a movement unworthy of a sovereign, he paused, assumed a noble and calm expression, which for him was easy enough, and waited with his back turned towards the window, in order to some extent to conceal his agitation from the eyes of the person who was about entering. It was only a jailer with a basket of provisions. The king looked at the man with anxiety, and waited for him to speak.

"Ah!" said the latter, "you have broken your chair, I should say! Why, you must have become quite mad."—"Monsieur," said the king, "be careful what you say; it will be a very serious affair for you."

The jailer placed the basket on the table, and looked at his prisoner steadily. "What do you say?" he said with surprise. —"Desire the governor to come to me," added the king, with dignity.—"Come, my boy," said the turnkey, "you have always been very quiet and reasonable; but you are getting vicious, it seems, and I wish to give you warning. You have broken your chair, and made a great disturbance; that is an offence punishable by imprisonment in one of the lower dungeons. Promise me not to begin over again, and I will not say a word about it to the governor."

"I wish to see the governor," replied the king, still controlling his passion.—"He will send you off to one of the dungeons, I tell you; so take care!"—"I insist upon it!—do you hear?" —"Ah! ah! your eyes are becoming wild again. Very good! I shall take away your knife."

The jailer did as he had said, closed the door and departed, leaving the king more astounded, more wretched, and more alone than ever. In vain he began again to pound the door; in vain he threw the plates and dishes out of the window; not a sound was heard in answer. Two hours later he could not be recognised as a king, a gentleman, a man, a human being; he might rather be called a madman, tearing the door with his nails, trying to tear up the flooring of his cell, and uttering such wild and fearful cries that the old Bastille seemed to tremble to its very foundations for having revolted against its master. As for the governor, the jailer did not even think of disturbing him; the turnkeys and the sentinels had made their report, but what was the good of it? Were not these madmen common enough in the fortress, and were not the walls still stronger than they?

Digitized by Google

M. de Baisemeaux, thoroughly impressed with what Aramis had told him, and in perfect conformity with the king's order, hoped only that one thing might happen; namely, that the madman Marchiali might be mad enough to hang himself to the canopy of his bed or to one of the bars of the window. In fact, the prisoner was anything but a profitable investment for M. Baisemeaux, and became more annoying than agreeable to him. These complications of Seldon and Marchiali, these complications of deliverance and reincarceration, these complications of personal resemblance, would have found a very proper *dénouement.* Baisemeaux even thought he had remarked that D'Herblay himself would not be altogether dissatisfied with it. "And then, really," said Baisemeaux to his next in command, "an ordinary prisoner is already unhappy enough in being a prisoner; he suffers quite enough indeed to induce one to hope, in charity, that his death may not be far distant. With still greater reason, then, when the prisoner has gone mad, and may bite and make a disturbance in the Bastille,—why, in that case it is not simply an act of mere charity to wish him dead; it would be almost a commendable action quietly to put him out of his misery." And the good-natured governor thereupon sat down to his late breakfast.

CHAPTER CCXXV

THE SHADOW OF FOUQUET

D'ARTAGNAN, still confused and oppressed by the conversation he had just had with the king, asked himself if he were really in possession of his senses; if the scene had occurred at Vaux; if he, D'Artagnan, were really the captain of the musketeers and Fouquet the owner of the château in which Louis XIV. was at that moment partaking of his hospitality. These reflections were not those of a drunken man, although everything was in prodigal profusion at Vaux, and the superintendent's wines had met with a distinguished reception at the *fête.*

The Gascon, however, was a man of calm self-possession; and when he touched his steel blade he was able to assume, figuratively, the coolness of that steel for his great occasions. "Well," he said, as he quitted the royal apartment, "I seem now to be mixed up historically with the destinies of the king

Digitized by Google

and of the minister; it will be written that M. d'Artagnan, a younger son of a Gascon family, placed his hand on the shoulder of M. Nicholas Fouquet, the superintendent of the finances of France. My descendants, if I have any, will flatter themselves with the distinction which this arrest will confer, just as the members of the De Luynes family have done with regard to the estates of the poor Maréchal d'Ancre. But now the thing to be done is to execute the king's directions in a proper manner. Any man would know how to say to M. Fouquet, 'Your sword, Monsieur!' But it is not every one who would be able to take care of M. Fouquet without others knowing anything about it. How am I to manage, then, so that Monsieur the Superintendent may pass from the height of favour to the direst disgrace; so that he may exchange Vaux for a dungeon; so that after having been steeped to his lips, as it were, in all the perfumes and incense of Ahasuerus, he may be transferred to the gallows of Haman,—in other words, of Enguerrand de Marigny?" And at this reflection D'Artagnan's brow became clouded with perplexity. The musketeer had scruples. To deliver thus to death (for not a doubt existed that Louis hated Fouquet mortally) the man who had just shown himself so delightful and charming a host in every way, was a real case of conscience. "It seems to me," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that if I am not a wretch, I shall let M. Fouquet know the purpose of the king in regard to him. Yet if I betray my master's secret, I shall be a false-hearted knave and a traitor,—a crime provided for and punishable by military laws, as proved by the fact that twenty times in the wars I have seen miserable fellows strung up for doing in little degree what my scruples counsel me to do on a larger scale. No, I think that a man of intelligence ought to get out of this difficulty with more skill than that. And now shall we admit that I have intelligence? It is doubtful; having drawn on it for forty years, I shall be lucky if there be a pistole's-worth left."

D'Artagnan buried his head in his hands, tore his moustache in sheer vexation, and added: "For what reason is M. Fouquet disgraced? For three reasons: the first, because M. Colbert doesn't like him; the second, because he wished to fall in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and, lastly, because the king likes M. Colbert and loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Oh, he is a lost man! But shall I put my foot on his neck,—I, a man, when he is falling a prey to the intrigues of a set of women and clerks? For shame! If he be dangerous, I will lay him low

Digitized by Google

enough; if, however, he be only persecuted, I will look on. I have come to such a decisive determination that neither king nor living man shall change my opinion. If Athos were here, he would do as I have done. Therefore, instead of going cold-bloodedly up to M. Fouquet and arresting him off-hand and shutting him up, I will try to conduct myself like a man who understands what good manners are. People will talk about it, of course; but they shall talk well of it, I am determined." And D'Artagnan, drawing by a gesture peculiar to himself his shoulder-belt over his shoulder, went straight off to Fouquet, who having taken leave of the ladies was preparing to sleep tranquilly after the triumphs of the day.

The air was still perfumed or infected, whichever way it may be considered, with the odour of the fireworks; the wax-lights were dying away in their sockets; the flowers fell unfastened from the garlands; the groups of dancers and courtiers were separating in the salons. Surrounded by his friends, who were complimenting him and receiving his flattering remarks in return, the superintendent half closed his wearied eyes. He longed for rest and quiet; he sank upon the bed of laurels which had been heaped up for him for so many days past,—it might almost have been said that he was bowed beneath the weight of the new debts which he had incurred for the purpose of giving the greatest possible honour to this *fête*. Fouquet had just retired to his room, still smiling, but more than half dead. He could listen to nothing more; he could hardly keep his eyes open; his bed seemed to possess a fascinating and irresistible attraction for him. The god Morpheus—the presiding deity of the dome painted by Lebrun—had extended his influence over the adjoining rooms, and showered down his most sleep-inducing poppies upon the master of the house. Fouquet, almost entirely alone, was being assisted by his *valet-de-chambre* to undress, when M. d'Artagnan appeared at the entrance of the room.

D'Artagnan had never been able to succeed in making himself common at the court; and notwithstanding he was seen everywhere and on all occasions, he never failed to produce an effect wherever and whenever he made his appearance. Such is the happy privilege of certain natures, which in that respect resemble the lightning or the thunder: every one recognises them; but their appearance never fails to arouse surprise and astonishment, and whenever it occurs the impression is always left that the last visitation was the loudest or brightest and most

violent. "What! M. d'Artagnan?" said Fouquet, who had already taken his right arm out of the sleeve of his doublet. "At your service," replied the musketeer.

"Come in, my dear M. d'Artagnan."—"Thank you."—"Have you come to criticise the *fête?* You have an ingenious mind."—"By no means."—"Are not your men looked after properly?"—"In every way."—"You are not comfortably lodged, perhaps?"—"Nothing could be better."

"In that case, I have to thank you for being so amiably disposed, and I must not fail to express my obligations to you for all your flattering kindness." These words were as much as to say, "My dear D'Artagnan, pray go to bed, since you have a bed to lie down on, and let me do the same."

D'Artagnan did not seem to understand. "Are you going to bed already?" he said to the superintendent.—"Yes; have you anything to say to me?"—"Nothing, Monsieur; nothing at all. You sleep in this room, then?"—"Yes; as you see."

"Monsieur, you have given a most charming *fête* to the king."—"Do you think so?"—"Oh, beautiful!"—"Is the king pleased?"—"Enchanted!"—"Did he desire you to say as much to me?"—"He would not choose so unworthy a messenger, Monseigneur."—"You do not do yourself justice, M. d'Artagnan."

"Is that your bed there?"—"Yes! but why do you ask? Are you not satisfied with your own?"—"May I speak frankly to you?"—"Most assuredly."—"Well, then, I am not."

Fouquet started; and then replied, "Will you take my room, M. d'Artagnan?"—"What! deprive you of it, Monseigneur? Never!"—"What am I to do, then?"—"Allow me to share it with you."

Fouquet looked at the musketeer fixedly. "Ah! ah!" he said, "you have just left the king?"—"I have, Monseigneur."—"And the king wishes you to pass the night in my room?"—"Monseigneur—"—"Very well, M. d'Artagnan, very well. You are master here."—"I assure you, Monseigneur, that I do not wish to abuse—"

Fouquet turned to his valet, and said, "Leave us!" When the man had left, he said to D'Artagnan, "You have something to say to me?"—"I?"—"A man of your superior intelligence cannot have come to talk with a man like myself, at such an hour as the present, without grave motives."—"Do not interrogate me."—"On the contrary, what do you want with me?"—"Nothing more than the pleasure of your society."

Digitized by Google

"Come into the garden, then," said the superintendent, suddenly, "or into the park."—"No," replied the musketeer, hastily; "no."—"Why?"—"The fresh air—"—"Come, admit at once that you arrest me," said the superintendent to the captain.—"Never!" said the latter.

"You intend to look after me, then?"—"Yes, Monseigneur, I do, upon my honour."—"Upon your honour!—ah, that is quite another thing! So I am to be arrested in my own house?"—"Do not say such a thing."—"On the contrary, I will proclaim it aloud."—"If you do so, I shall be compelled to persuade you to be silent."

"Very good! Violence towards me in my own house! Ah, that is well done!"—"We do not seem to understand each other at all. Stay a moment! There is a chess-board there; we will have a game, if you have no objection."—"M. d'Artagnan, I am in disgrace, then?"—"Not at all; but—"—"I am prohibited, I suppose, from withdrawing from your sight."—"I do not understand a word you are saying, Monseigneur; and if you wish me to withdraw, tell me so."

"My dear M. d'Artagnan, your mode of action is enough to drive me mad. I was almost sinking for want of sleep, but you have completely awakened me."—"I shall never forgive myself, I am sure; and if you wish to reconcile me with myself, why, go to sleep in your bed in my presence; I shall be delighted at it."—"I am under surveillance, I see."—"I will leave the room, then."—"You are beyond my comprehension."—"Good-night, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to withdraw.

Fouquet ran after him. "I will not lie down," he said. "Seriously, and since you refuse to treat me as a man, and since you finesse with me, I will try to set you at bay, as a hunter does a wild boar."—"Bah!" cried D'Artagnan, pretending to smile.—"I shall order my horses and set off for Paris," said Fouquet, sounding the heart of the captain of the musketeers.—"If that be the case, Monseigneur, it is very different."—"You will arrest me?"—"No; but I shall go with you."

"That is quite sufficient, M. d'Artagnan," returned Fouquet, in a cold tone of voice. "It is not idly that you have acquired your reputation as a man of intelligence and full of resources; but with me that is quite superfluous. Let us two come to the point. Grant me a service. Why do you arrest me? What have I done?"—"Oh, I know nothing about what you may have done; but I do not arrest you—this evening."—"This

Digitized by Google

evening!" said Fouquet, turning pale; "but to-morrow?"—"It is not to-morrow just yet, Monseigneur. Who can ever answer for the morrow?"

"Quick, quick, Captain! let me speak to M. d'Herblay."—"Alas! that is quite impossible, Monseigneur. I have strict orders to see that you hold no communication with any one."—"With M. d'Herblay, Captain,—with your friend!"—"Monseigneur, is M. d'Herblay the only person with whom you ought to be prevented from holding any communication?"

Fouquet coloured, and then assuming an air of resignation, said: "You are right, Monsieur; you have taught me a lesson that I ought not to have provoked. A fallen man cannot assert his right to anything, even to those whose fortunes he may have made; for a still greater reason he cannot claim anything from those to whom he may never have had the happiness of doing a service."—"Monseigneur!"—"It is true, M. d'Artagnan; you have always acted in the most admirable manner towards me,—in such a manner, indeed, as most becomes the man who is destined to arrest me. You, at least, have never asked me anything."

"Monseigneur," replied the Gascon, touched by his eloquent and noble tone of grief, "will you—I ask it as a favour—pledge me your word as a man of honour that you will not leave this room?"—"What is the use of it, dear M. d'Artagnan, since you keep watch and ward over me? Do you suppose that I should struggle against the most valiant sword in the kingdom?"—"It is not that at all, Monseigneur; but that I am going to look for M. d'Herblay, and consequently to leave you alone."

Fouquet uttered a cry of delight and surprise. "To look for M. d'Herblay, to leave me alone!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together.—"Which is M. d'Herblay's room? The blue room, is it not?"—"Yes, my friend, yes."—"Your friend! thank you for that word, Monseigneur; you confer it upon me to-day, at least, even if you have never done so before."—"Ah, you have saved me!"

"It will take me a good ten minutes to go from hence to the blue room, and to return?" said D'Artagnan.—"Nearly so."—"And then to wake Aramis, who sleeps soundly when he sleeps at all, I put that down at another five minutes; making a total of fifteen minutes' absence. And now, Monseigneur, give me your word that you will not in any way attempt to make your escape, and that when I return I shall find you here

again."—"I give it to you, Monsieur," replied Fouquet, with an expression of the warmest and deepest gratitude.

D'Artagnan disappeared. Fouquet looked at him as he quitted the room, waited with feverish impatience until the door was closed behind him, and as soon as it was shut, fled to his keys, opened two or three secret doors concealed in various articles of furniture in the room, looked vainly for certain papers, which doubtless he had left at St. Mandé, and which he seemed to regret not finding; then hurriedly seizing hold of letters, contracts, writings, he heaped them up into a pile, which he burned in the extremest haste upon the marble hearth of the fireplace, not even taking time to draw from the interior of it the vases and pots of flowers with which it was filled. As soon as he had finished, like a man who had just escaped an imminent danger, and whose strength abandons him as soon as the danger is past, he sank down, completely overcome, on a couch.

When D'Artagnan returned, he found Fouquet in the same position. The worthy musketeer had not the slightest doubt that Fouquet, having given his word, would not even think of failing to keep it; but he had thought it most likely that Fouquet would turn his (D'Artagnan's) absence to the best advantage in getting rid of all the papers, memorandums, and contracts which might possibly render his position, which was even now serious enough, still more dangerous. And so, lifting up his head like a dog who gains the scent, D'Artagnan perceived a certain odour resembling smoke, which he had fully expected to find in the atmosphere; and having found it, he made a movement of his head in token of satisfaction.

When D'Artagnan entered, Fouquet had, on his side, raised his head, and not one of D'Artagnan's movements had escaped him. The looks of the two men met, and they both saw that they had understood each other without exchanging a syllable. "Well!" asked Fouquet, the first to speak, "and M. d'Herblay?"—"Upon my word, Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "M. d'Herblay must be desperately fond of walks by night, and composing verses by moonlight in the park of Vaux with some of your poets in all probability; for he is not in his room."

"What! not in his room?" cried Fouquet, whose last hope had thus escaped him; for without knowing in what way the Bishop of Vannes could assist him, he well knew that he could not expect assistance from any one else. "Or, indeed," con-

tinued D'Artagnan, "if he is in his own room, he has very good reasons for not answering."—"But surely you did not call him in such a manner that he could have heard you?"

"You can hardly suppose, Monseigneur, that having already exceeded my orders, which forbade my leaving you a single moment,—you can hardly suppose, I say, that I should have been mad enough to rouse the whole house and allow myself to be seen in the corridor of the Bishop of Vannes, in order that M. Colbert might state with positive certainty that I gave you time to burn your papers."—"My papers?"—"Of course; at least, that is what I should have done in your place. When any one opens a door for me, I always avail myself of it."—"Yes, yes, and I thank you; I have availed myself of it."

"And you have done right, *morbleu!* Every man has his own peculiar secrets, with which others have nothing to do. But let us return to Aramis, Monseigneur."—"Well, then, I tell you, you could not have called loudly enough, or he would have heard you."—"However softly any one may call Aramis, Monseigneur, he always hears when he has an interest in hearing. I repeat what I said before,—Aramis was not in his own room, or he had certain reasons for not recognising my voice, of which I am ignorant, and of which you even may be ignorant yourself, notwithstanding your liegeman is his greatness the Lord Bishop of Vannes."

Fouquet drew a deep sigh, rose from his seat, made three or four turns in his room, and finished by seating himself, with an expression of extreme dejection, upon his magnificent bed with velvet hangings and trimmed with the costliest lace.

D'Artagnan looked at Fouquet with feelings of the deepest and sincerest pity. "I have seen a good many men arrested in my life," said the musketeer, sadly,—"I have seen both M. de Cinq-Mars and M. de Chalais arrested, though I was very young then; I have seen M. de Condé arrested with the princes; I have seen M. de Retz arrested; I have seen M. Broussel arrested. Stay a moment, Monseigneur! It is disagreeable to have to say it; but the very one of all those whom you most resemble at this moment was that poor fellow Broussel. You were very near doing as he did,—putting your dinner napkin in your portfolio, and wiping your mouth with your papers. *Mordioux!* Monseigneur Fouquet, a man like you ought not to be dejected in this manner. Suppose your friends saw you."

"M. d'Artagnan," returned the superintendent, with a smile full of gentleness, "you do not understand me. It is precisely

because my friends do not see me, that I am such as you see me now. I do not live isolated from others; I am nothing when left to myself. Understand that throughout my whole life I have passed every moment of my time in making friends whom I hoped to render my stay and support. In times of prosperity all these happy voices—and rendered so by me—formed in my honour a concert of praises and kindly actions. In the least disfavour, these humbler voices accompanied in harmonious accents the murmur of my own heart. Isolation I have never yet known. Poverty—a phantom I have sometimes beheld, clad in rags, awaiting me at the end of my journey through life—poverty is the spectre with which many of my own friends have trifled for years past, which they poetise and caress, and to which they have attracted me. Poverty!—I accept it, acknowledge it, receive it as a disinherited sister; for poverty is not solitude, nor exile, nor imprisonment. Is it likely I shall ever be poor, with such friends as Pellisson, as La Fontaine, as Molière; with such a mistress as— Oh! solitude, to me, a man of society; to me, a man inclined to pleasure; to me, who exist only because others exist— Oh, if you knew how utterly lonely and desolate I feel at this moment, and how you, who separate me from all I love, seem to be the image of solitude, of annihilation, and of death!"

"But I have already told you, M. Fouquet," replied D'Artagnan, moved to the depths of his soul, "that you exaggerate matters a great deal too much. The king likes you."—"No, no," said Fouquet, shaking his head.—"M. de Colbert hates you."—"M. de Colbert! What does that matter to me?"—"He will ruin you."—"Oh! I defy him to do that, for I am ruined already."

At this singular confession of the superintendent, D'Artagnan cast his glance all round the room; and although he did not open his lips, Fouquet understood him so thoroughly that he added: "What can be done with these magnificent things when one is no longer magnificent? Do you know what good the greater part of the wealth and the possessions which we rich enjoy, confer upon us?—merely to disgust us, by their very splendour even, with everything which does not equal this splendour. Vaux, you will say, and the wonders of Vaux! What then? What boot these wonders? If I am ruined, how shall I fill with water the urns which my Naiads bear in their arms, or force the air into the lungs of my Tritons? To be rich enough, M. d'Artagnan, a man must be too rich."

Google

D'Artagnan shook his head. "Oh, I know very well what you think," replied Fouquet, quickly. "If Vaux were yours, you would sell it, and would purchase an estate in the country,—an estate which should have woods, orchards, and fields,—an estate which should support its master. With forty millions you would do well—"—"Ten millions," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Not a million, my dear captain! No one in France is rich enough to give two millions for Vaux, and to continue to maintain it as I have done; no one could do it,—no one would know how."—"Well," said D'Artagnan, "in any case, a million is not misery."—"It is not far from it, my dear Monsieur. But you do not understand me. No; I will not sell my residence at Vaux,—I will give it to you, if you like;" and Fouquet accompanied these words with a movement of the shoulders to which it would be impossible to do justice.

"Give it to the king; you will make a better bargain."—"The king does not require me to give it to him," said Fouquet. "He will take it away from me very readily if it pleases him; and that is the reason why I should prefer to see it perish. Do you know, M. d'Artagnan, that if the king were not under my roof, I would take this candle, go straight to the dome, set fire to a couple of huge chests of fusees and fireworks which are in reserve there, and reduce my palace to ashes."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, negligently. "At all events, you would not be able to burn the gardens; and that is the best part of the establishment."—"And yet," resumed Fouquet, thoughtfully, "what was I saying? Great heavens! burn Vaux,—destroy my palace! But Vaux is not mine. This wealth, these wonderful creations, are, it is true, the property, so far as sense of enjoyment goes, of the man who has paid for them; but so far as duration is concerned, they belong to those who created them. Vaux belongs to Lebrun, to Lenôtre, to Pellisson, to Levau, to La Fontaine, to Molière; Vaux belongs to posterity, in fact. You see, M. d'Artagnan, that my very house ceases to be my own."

"That is good," said D'Artagnan; "I like that idea, and I recognise M. Fouquet himself in it. That idea, indeed, makes me forget that poor fellow Broussel altogether; and I recall no longer the whining complaints of that old Frondeur. If you are ruined, Monsieur, look at the affair manfully; for you too, *mordioux!* belong to posterity, and have no right to lessen yourself in any way. Stay a moment! Look at me,—I who seem to exercise in a degree a kind of superiority over you

because I arrest you. Fate, which distributes their different parts to the comedians of this world, accorded to me a less agreeable and less advantageous part to fill than yours has been. I am one of those who think that the parts which kings and powerful nobles are called upon to act are of infinitely more worth than those of beggars or lackeys. It is better on the stage,—on the stage, I mean, of another theatre than that of this world,—it is better to wear a fine coat and to talk fine language than to walk the boards shod with a pair of old shoes or to get one's backbone caressed by sticks well laid on. In one word, you have been a prodigal with money, have ordered and been obeyed, have been steeped to the lips in enjoyment; while I have dragged my tether after me, have been commanded and have obeyed, and have drudged my life away. Well, although I may seem of such trifling importance beside you, Monseigneur, I do declare to you that the recollection of what I have done serves me as a spur, and prevents me from bowing my old head too soon. I shall remain until the very end a good trooper; and when my turn comes I shall fall perfectly straight, all in heap, still alive, after having selected my place beforehand. Do as I do, M. Fouquet,—you will not find yourself the worse for it; that happens only once in a lifetime to men like yourself, and the chief thing is to do it well when the chance presents itself. There is a Latin proverb—the words have escaped me, but I remember the sense of it very well, for I have thought it over more than once—which says, 'The end crowns the work!'"

Fouquet rose from his seat, passed his arm round D'Artagnan's neck, and clasped him in a close embrace, while with the other hand he pressed the captain's hand. "An excellent homily," he said after a moment's pause.—"A soldier's, Monseigneur."—"You have a regard for me in telling me all that."—"Perhaps."

Fouquet resumed his pensive attitude once more, and then, a moment after, said: "Where can M. d'Herblay be? I dare not ask you to send for him."—"You would not ask me, because I would not do it, M. Fouquet. People would learn it; and Aramis, who is not mixed up with the affair, might possibly be compromised and included in your disgrace."

"I will wait here till daylight," said Fouquet.—"Yes; that is best."—"What shall we do when daylight comes?"—"I know nothing at all about it, Monseigneur."

"M. d'Artagnan, will you do me a favour?"—"Most willingly."—"You guard me, I remain; you are acting in the full

Digitized by Google

discharge of your duty, I suppose?"—"Certainly."—"Very good, then; remain as close to me as my shadow, if you like. I prefer that shadow to any other."

D'Artagnan bowed. "But forget that you are M. d'Artagnan, captain of the musketeers; forget that I am M. Fouquet, superintendent of the finances, and let us talk about my affairs."—"*Peste!* a thorny subject that!"—"Truly?"—"Yes; but for your sake, M. Fouquet, I would do the impossible."

"Thank you. What did the king say to you?"—"Nothing."—"Ah! is that the way you talk?"—"The deuce!"—"What do you think of my situation?"—"Nothing."—"However, unless you have some ill-feeling against me—"—"Your position is a difficult one."—"In what respect?"—"Because you are under your own roof."

"However difficult it may be, yet I understand it very well."—"Do you suppose that with any one else but yourself I should have shown so much frankness?"—"What! so much frankness, do you say,—you who refuse to tell me the slightest thing?"—"At all events, then, so much ceremony and so much consideration."—"Ah! I admit that."

"One moment, Monseigneur! Let me tell you how I should have behaved towards any one but yourself. I should have arrived at your door just as your friends had left you, or if they had not yet gone I should have waited until they were leaving, and should then have caught them one after the other like rabbits; I should have locked them up quietly; I should have stolen softly along the carpet of your corridor, and with one hand upon you, before you suspected the slightest thing about it, I should have kept you safely until my master's breakfast in the morning. In this way I should have avoided all publicity, all disturbance, all opposition; but there would also have been no warning for M. Fouquet, no consideration for his feelings, none of those delicate concessions which are shown by persons who are essentially courteous in their natures wherever the decisive moment may arrive. Are you satisfied with that plan?"—"It makes me shudder."

"I thought you would not like it. It would have been very disagreeable had I chosen to appear to-morrow without notice and to ask you for your sword."—"Oh, Monsieur, I should have died from shame and anger."

"Your gratitude is too eloquently expressed. I have not done enough to deserve it, I assure you."—"Most certainly, Monsieur, you will never get me to believe that."—"Well, then,

Monseigneur, if you are satisfied with what I have done, and have somewhat recovered from the shock which I prepared you for as much as I could, let us allow the few hours that remain to pass away undisturbed. You are harassed, and require to arrange your thoughts; I beg you, therefore, to go to sleep, or pretend to go to sleep, either on your bed or in your bed. I shall sleep in this arm-chair; and when I fall asleep my rest is so sound that a cannon could not wake me."

Fouquet smiled.

"I except, however," continued the musketeer, "the case where one opens a door, whether secret or visible, whether to go out or to come in. Oh, for that my ear is sensitive to the last degree! Any creaking noise makes me start,—it is a matter of natural antipathy. Move about as much as you like; walk up and down in any part of the room; write, efface, destroy, burn: but do not touch either the key or the handle of the door; for I should start up in a moment, and that would shake my nerves terribly."

"M. d'Artagnan," said Fouquet, "you are certainly the most witty and the most courteous man I ever met; and you will leave me only one regret,—that of having made your acquaintance so late." D'Artagnan drew a deep sigh, which seemed to say, "Alas! you have perhaps made it too soon." He then settled himself in his arm-chair; while Fouquet, half lying on his bed and leaning on his arm, meditated upon his adventure. In this way both of them, leaving the candles burning, awaited the first dawn of the day; and when Fouquet happened to sigh too loudly, D'Artagnan only snored the louder. Not a single visit, not even from Aramis, disturbed their quietude; not a sound, even, was heard throughout the vast palace. Outside, the guards of honour and the patrols of the musketeers paced up and down; and the sound of their feet could be heard on the gravel walks. It was an additional soporific for the sleepers; while the murmuring of the wind through the trees and the unceasing music of the fountains still went on uninterruptedly, without being disturbed at the slight noises and trifling affairs of which the life and death of man consist.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXVI

THE MORNING

In contrast with the sad and terrible destiny of the king imprisoned in the Bastille, and tearing, in sheer despair, the bolts and bars of his dungeon, the rhetoric of the chroniclers of old would not fail to present the antithesis of Philippe lying asleep beneath the royal canopy. We do not pretend to say that such rhetoric is always bad, and always scatters in places it should not the flowers with which it embellishes history. But we shall not dwell on the antithesis, but shall proceed to draw with interest another picture to serve as a companion to the one we have drawn in the last chapter.

The young prince descended from Aramis's room in the same way the king had descended from the apartment dedicated to Morpheus. The dome gradually and slowly sank down under Aramis's pressure, and Philippe stood beside the royal bed, which had ascended again, after having deposited its prisoner in the secret depths of the subterranean passage. Alone, in the presence of all the luxury which surrounded him; alone, in the presence of his power; alone, with the part he was about to be forced to act, Philippe's soul for the first time opened to the thousand varied emotions which are the vital throbs of a royal heart. But he could not help changing colour when he looked upon the empty bed, still tumbled by his brother's body. This mute accomplice had returned, after having served in the consummation of the enterprise; it returned with the traces of the crime; it spoke to the guilty author of that crime, with the frank and unreserved language which an accomplice never fears to use towards his companion in guilt,—it spoke the truth. Philippe bent over the bed, and perceived a pocket-handkerchief lying on it which was still damp with the cold sweat that had poured from Louis XIV.'s face. This sweat-bestained handkerchief terrified Philippe, as the blood of Abel terrified Cain.

"I am now face to face with my destiny," said Philippe, with his eyes on fire and his face livid. "Will it be more terrifying than my captivity has been sad and gloomy? Forced to pursue at every moment the usurpations of thought, shall I never cease to listen to the scruples of my heart? Yes; the

king has lain on this bed. It is indeed his head that has left its impression on this pillow, his bitter tears that have stained this handkerchief; and yet I hesitate to throw myself on the bed, or to press in my hand the handkerchief which is embroidered with my brother's arms. Away with this weakness! Let me imitate M. d'Herblay, who asserts that a man's action should be always one degree above his thought; let me imitate M. d'Herblay, whose thoughts are of and for himself alone, who regards himself as a man of honour, so long as he injures or betrays his enemies only. I, I alone should have occupied this bed, if Louis XIV. had not, owing to my mother's criminal abandonment of me, stood in my way; and this handkerchief, embroidered with the arms of France, would, in right and justice, belong to me alone, if, as M. d'Herblay observes, I had been left in my place in the royal cradle! Philippe, son of France, take your place on that bed; Philippe, sole King of France, resume the blazonry which is yours! Philippe, sole heir presumptive to Louis XIII., your father, show yourself without pity or mercy for the usurper who at this moment has no remorse for all that you have suffered!" With these words, Philippe, notwithstanding an instinctive repugnance of feeling, and in spite of the shudder of terror which mastered his will, threw himself on the royal bed, and forced his muscles to press the still warm place where Louis XIV. had lain, while he buried his burning face in the handkerchief still moistened by his brother's tears. With his head thrown back and buried in the soft down of his pillow, Philippe perceived above him the crown of France, held, as we have stated, by the angel with golden wings.

Imagine, then, the royal intruder, his eyes gloomy, his body trembling. He is like a tiger led out of his way by a night of storm, who comes through the reeds by way of a ravine unknown to him, to lie down in the cave of an absent lion. The feline odour has attracted him,—that warm, moist atmosphere of his ordinary habitation. He has found a bed of dry herbs, and bones pulverised and pasty like marrow. He arrives; he turns about his flaming eyes, piercing the gloom; he shakes his streaming limbs and his body, covered with mire, and lies down heavily, his large nose resting on his enormous paws,—ready to sleep, but ready also to fight. From time to time the lightning blazing in the recesses of the cave, the noise of clashing branches, the sound of falling stones, the vague apprehension of danger, draw him from the lethargy occasioned by fatigue.

Digitized by Google

A man may be ambitious of lying in a lion's den, but can hardly hope to sleep there quietly. Philippe listened attentively to every sound, his heart almost stifled by all his fears; but confident in his own strength, which was increased by the force of an overpowering resolute determination, he waited until some decisive circumstance should permit him to judge for himself. He hoped that some great danger would show him the way, like those phosphoric lights of the tempest which show the sailors the height of the waves against which they have to struggle. But nothing happened. Silence, the mortal enemy of restless hearts, the mortal enemy of ambitious minds, shrouded in the thickness of its gloom during the remainder of the night the future King of France, who lay there sheltered beneath his stolen crown. Towards the morning a shadow, rather than a body, glided into the royal chamber; Philippe expected his approach, and neither expressed nor exhibited any surprise.

"Well, M. d'Herblay?" he said.—"Well, Sire, all is done."—"How?"—"Exactly as we expected."—"Did he resist?"—"Terribly! tears and entreaties."—"And then?"—"Then stupor."—"But at last?"—"Oh, at last a complete victory, and absolute silence."

"Did the governor of the Bastille suspect anything?"—"Nothing."—"The resemblance, however—"—"That was the cause of the success."—"But the prisoner cannot fail to explain himself. Think well of that. I have myself been able to do that,—I, who had to contend with a power much better established than is mine."

"I have already provided for everything. In a few days, sooner perhaps, we will take the captive out of his prison, and will send him out of the country to a place of exile so remote—"—"People can return from exile, M. d'Herblay."—"To a place of exile so distant, I was going to say, that human strength and the duration of human life would not be enough for his return." And once more a cold look of intelligence passed between Aramis and the young king.

"And M. du Vallon?" asked Philippe, in order to change the conversation.—"He will be presented to you to-day, and confidentially will congratulate you on your escape from the danger to which that usurper has exposed you."—"What is to be done with him?"—"With M. du Vallon?"—"A dukedom, I suppose."—"Yes, a dukedom," replied Aramis, smiling in a significant manner.

"Why do you laugh, M. d'Herblay?"—"I laugh at the

Digitized by Google

extreme caution of your Majesty."—"Cautious! why so?"—"Your Majesty is doubtless afraid that that poor Porthos may probably become a troublesome witness; and you wish to get rid of him."—"What! in making him a duke?"—"Certainly; you would assuredly kill him, for he would die from joy, and the secret would die with him."—"Good heavens!"—"Yes," said Aramis, phlegmatically; "I should lose a very good friend."

At this moment, and in the middle of this idle conversation, under the light tone of which the two conspirators concealed their joy and pride at their mutual success, Aramis heard something which made him prick up his ears.

"What is that?" said Philippe.—"The dawn, Sire."—"Well?"—"Well, before you retired to bed last night, you probably decided to do something this morning at the break of day."—"Yes; I told my captain of the musketeers," replied the young man, hurriedly, "that I should expect him."

"If you told him that, he will certainly be here, for he is a most punctual man."—"I hear a step in the vestibule."—"It must be he."—"Come, let us begin the attack," said the young king, resolutely.

"Be cautious, for heaven's sake; to begin the attack, and with D'Artagnan, would be madness. D'Artagnan knows nothing; he has seen nothing. He is a hundred leagues from suspecting our mystery; but if he comes into this room the first this morning, he will be sure to detect that something has taken place which he will think his business to occupy himself about. Before we allow D'Artagnan to penetrate into this room, we must air the room thoroughly, or introduce so many people into it that the keenest scent in the whole kingdom may be deceived by the traces of twenty different persons."

"But how can I send him away, since I have given him a rendezvous?" observed the prince, impatient to measure swords with so redoubtable an antagonist.—"I will take care of that," replied the bishop; "and in order to begin, I am going to strike a blow which will completely stupefy our man."—"He too is striking a blow, for I hear him at the door," added the prince, hurriedly. And, in fact, a knock at the door was heard at that moment. Aramis was not mistaken; for it was indeed D'Artagnan who adopted that mode of announcing himself.

We have seen how he passed the night in philosophising with M. Fouquet, but the musketeer was very wearied even of feigning to fall asleep, and as soon as the dawn illumined with its pale blue light the sumptuous cornices of the superintendent's room,

D'Artagnan rose from his arm-chair, arranged his sword, brushed his coat and hat with his sleeve, like a private soldier getting ready for inspection.

"Are you going out?" said Fouquet.—"Yes, Monseigneur. And you?"—"No; I shall remain."—"You give me your word?"—"Certainly."—"Very good. Besides, my only reason for going out is to try and get that reply: you know what I mean?"—"That sentence, you mean."

"Stay, I have something of the old Roman in me. This morning, when I got up, I remarked that my sword had not caught in one of the aiguletes, and that my shoulder-belt had slipped quite off. That is an infallible sign."—"Of prosperity?"—"Yes; be sure of it,—for every time that that confounded belt of mine stuck fast to my back, it always signified a punishment from M. de Tréville, or a refusal of money by M. de Mazarin. Every time my sword hung fast to my shoulder-belt, it always predicted some disagreeable commission or other for me to execute; and I have had showers of them all my life through. Every time, too, my sword danced about in its sheath, a duel, fortunate in its result, was sure to follow; whenever it dangled about the calves of my legs, it was a slight wound; every time it fell completely out of the scabbard, I was booked, and made up my mind that I should have to remain on the field of battle, with two or three months under the surgeon's care into the bargain."

"I never knew your sword kept you so well informed," said Fouquet, with a faint smile, which showed how he was struggling against his own weaknesses. "Is your sword bewitched, or under the influence of some charm?"—"Why, you must know that my sword may almost be regarded as part of my own body. I have heard that certain men seem to have warnings given them by feeling something the matter with their legs, or by a throbbing of their temples. With me, it is my sword that warns me. Well, it told me of nothing this morning. But stay a moment; look here, it has just fallen of its own accord into the last hole of the belt. Do you know what that is a warning of?"—"No."—"Well, that tells me of an arrest that will have to be made this very day."

"Well," said the superintendent, more astonished than annoyed by this frankness, "if there is nothing disagreeable predicted to you by your sword, I am to conclude that it is not disagreeable for you to arrest me."—"You? arrest you?"—"Of course. The warning—"—"Does not concern you, since

you have been arrested ever since yesterday. It is not you I shall have to arrest, be assured of that. That is the reason why I am delighted, and also the reason why I said that my day will be a happy one."

And with these words, pronounced with the most affectionate graciousness of manner, the captain took leave of Fouquet in order to wait upon the king. He was on the point of leaving the room when Fouquet said to him, "One last mark of your kindness."—"What is it, Monseigneur?"—"M. d'Herblay,—let me see M. d'Herblay."—"I am going to try and get him to come to you."

D'Artagnan did not think himself so good a prophet. It was written that the day would pass away and realise all the predictions that had been made in the morning. He had accordingly knocked, as we have seen, at the king's door. The door opened. The captain thought that it was the king who had just opened it himself; and this supposition was not altogether inadmissible, considering the state of agitation in which he had left Louis XIV. on the previous evening. But instead of his royal master, whom he was on the point of saluting with the greatest respect, he perceived the long, calm features of Aramis. So extreme was his surpise that he could hardly refrain from uttering a loud exclamation. "Aramis!" he said.—"Good-morning, dear D'Artagnan," replied the prelate, coldly.—"You here?" stammered out the musketeer.

"His Majesty desires you to report that he is still sleeping, after having been greatly fatigued during the whole night."—"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, who could not understand how the Bishop of Vannes, who had been so indifferent a favourite the previous evening, had become in half-a-dozen hours the largest mushroom of fortune which had ever sprung up in a sovereign's bedroom. In fact, to transmit the orders of the king even to the mere threshold of that monarch's room, to serve as an intermediary of Louis XIV. so as to be able to give a single order in his name at a couple of paces from him, he must be greater than Richelieu had ever been to Louis XIII. D'Artagnan's expressive eye, his half-opened lips, his curling moustache, said as much, indeed, in the plainest language to the chief favourite, who remained calm and unmoved. "Moreover," continued the bishop, "you will be good enough, Monsieur the Captain of the Musketeers, to allow those only to pass into the king's room this morning who have special permission. His Majesty does not wish to be disturbed just yet."

Digitized by Google

"But," objected D'Artagnan, on the point of refusing to obey this order, and particularly of giving unrestrained passage to the suspicions which the king's silence had aroused,—"but, Monsieur the Bishop, his Majesty gave me a rendezvous for this morning."—"Later, later," said the king's voice from the bottom of the alcove,—a voice which made a cold shudder pass through the musketeer's veins. He bowed, amazed, confused, and stupefied by the smile with which Aramis seemed to overwhelm him as soon as those words had been pronounced.

"And then," continued the bishop, "as an answer to what you were coming to ask the king, my dear D'Artagnan, here is an order of his Majesty, which you will be good enough to attend to forthwith, for it concerns M. Fouquet." D'Artagnan took the order which was held out to him. "To be set at liberty!" he murmured. "Ah!" and he uttered a second "ah!" still more full of intelligence than the former,—for this order explained Aramis's presence with the king. Aramis, in order to have obtained Fouquet's pardon, must have made considerable progress in the royal favour; and this favour explained, in its tenor, the hardly conceivable assurance with which M. d'Herblay issued the orders in the king's name. For D'Artagnan it was quite sufficient to have understood something in order to understand everything. He bowed, and withdrew a couple of steps, as if he were about to leave.

"I am going with you," said the bishop.—"Where to?"—"To M. Fouquet; I wish to be a witness of his delight."—"Ah, Aramis, how you puzzled me just now!" said D'Artagnan, again.—"But you understand now, I suppose?"—"Of course I understand," he said aloud; but then he added in a low tone to himself, almost hissing the words through his teeth, "No, no! I do not understand yet. But it is all the same,—here is the order;" and then he added, "I will lead the way, Monseigneur," and he conducted Aramis to Fouquet's apartments.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXVII

THE KING'S FRIEND

FOUQUET was waiting with anxiety; he had already sent away many of his servants and his friends, who, anticipating the usual hour of his ordinary receptions, had called at his door to inquire after him. Preserving the utmost silence respecting the danger suspended over his head, he only asked them—as he did every one, indeed, who came to the door—where Aramis was. When he saw D'Artagnan return, and when he perceived the Bishop of Vannes behind him, he could hardly restrain his delight; it was fully equal to his previous uneasiness. The mere sight of Aramis was a complete compensation to the superintendent for the unhappiness he had undergone in being arrested. The prelate was silent and grave, D'Artagnan completely bewildered by such an accumulation of events.

"Well, Captain, so you have brought M. d'Herblay to me?"—"And something better still, Monseigneur."—"What is that?"—"Liberty."—"I am free?"—"Yes,—by the king's order."

Fouquet resumed his usual serenity that he might interrogate Aramis with his look. "Oh, yes; you can thank M. the Bishop of Vannes," pursued D'Artagnan, "for it is indeed to him that you owe the change that has taken place in the king."—"Oh!" said Fouquet, more humiliated at the service than grateful at its success.—"But you," continued D'Artagnan, addressing Aramis,—"you who have become M. Fouquet's protector and patron,—can you not do something for me?"—"Anything you like, my friend," replied the bishop, in a calm voice.

"One thing only, then, and I shall be perfectly satisfied. How have you managed to become the favourite of the king, you who have never spoken to him more than twice in your life?"—"From a friend such as you are," said Aramis, "I cannot conceal anything."—"Ah, very good! tell me, then."

"Very well. You think that I have seen the king only twice, while the fact is I have seen him more than a hundred times; only we have kept it very secret, that is all." And without trying to remove the colour which at this revelation made D'Artagnan's face flush scarlet, Aramis turned towards M. Fouquet, who was as much surprised as the musketeer. "Mon-

seigneur," he resumed, "the king desires me to inform you that he is more than ever your friend, and that the beautiful *fête* so generously offered by you on his behalf has touched him to the heart."

And thereupon he saluted M. Fouquet with so much reverence of manner that the latter, unable to understand a man whose diplomacy was of so prodigious a character, remained incapable of uttering a single syllable, and equally incapable of thought or movement. D'Artagnan fancied that these two men had something to say to each other, and he was about to yield to that feeling of instinctive politeness which hurries a man towards the door when he feels his presence is an inconvenience for others; but his eager curiosity, spurred on by so many mysteries, counselled him to remain. Aramis thereupon turned towards him, and said in a quiet tone, "You will not forget, my friend, the king's order respecting those whom he intends to receive this morning on rising." These words were clear enough, and the musketeer understood them; he therefore bowed to Fouquet, and then to Aramis,—to the latter with a slight admixture of ironical respect,—and disappeared.

No sooner had he left than Fouquet, whose impatience had hardly been able to wait for that moment, darted towards the door to close it; and then returning to the bishop, he said, "My dear D'Herblay, I think it now high time you should explain to me what has passed, for, in plain and honest truth, I do not understand anything."

"We will explain all that to you," said Aramis, sitting down, and making Fouquet sit down also. "Where shall I begin?"—"With this, first of all. Why does the king set me at liberty?"—"You ought rather to ask me what was his reason for having you arrested."—"Since my arrest I have had time to think it over, and my idea is that it arises out of some slight feeling of jealousy. My *fête* put M. Colbert out of temper, and M. Colbert discovered some cause of complaint against me,—Belle-Isle, for instance."

"No; there is no question at all just now of Belle-Isle."—"What is it, then?"—"Do you remember those receipts for thirteen millions which M. de Mazarin contrived to get stolen from you?"—"Yes, of course."—"Well, you are already pronounced to be a public robber."—"Good heavens!"

"Oh, that is not all. Do you also remember that letter you wrote to La Vallière?"—"Alas! yes."—"And that proclaims you a traitor and a suborner."—"Why should he have pardoned

me, then? "—"We have not yet arrived at that part of our argument. I wish you to be quite convinced of the fact itself. Observe this well: the king knows you to be guilty of an appropriation of public funds. Oh, of course *I* know that you have done nothing of the kind; but at all events the king has not seen the receipts, and he cannot do otherwise than believe you criminal."

"I beg your pardon, I do not see—"—"You will see presently, though. The king, moreover, having read your love-letter to La Vallière, and the offers you there made her, cannot retain any doubt of your intentions with regard to that young lady; you will admit that, I suppose? "—"Certainly; but conclude." —"In a few words. The king is, therefore, a powerful, implacable, and eternal enemy for you."

"Agreed. But am I, then, so powerful that he has not dared to sacrifice me, notwithstanding his hatred, with all the means which my weakness or my misfortunes may have given him as a hold upon me? "—"It is clear, beyond all doubt," pursued Aramis, coldly, "that the king has quarrelled irreconcilably with you."—"But since he absolves me—"—"Do you believe it?" asked the bishop with a searching look.—"Without believing in his sincerity of heart, I believe in the truth of the fact."

Aramis slightly shrugged his shoulders. "But why, then, should Louis XIV. have commissioned you to tell me what you have just stated? "—"The king charged me with nothing for you."—"With nothing! " said the superintendent, stupefied. "But that order, then—"

"Oh, yes! you are quite right. There is an order, certainly; " and these words were pronounced by Aramis in so strange a tone that Fouquet could not suppress a movement of surprise. "You are concealing something from me, I see." Aramis softly rubbed his white fingers over his chin, but said nothing.

"Does the king exile me? "—"Do not act as if you were playing at the game at which children play when they guess where a thing has been hidden, and are informed by a bell being rung when they are approaching near to it, or going away from it."—"Speak, then."—"Guess."—"You alarm me."—"Bah! that is because you have not guessed, then."—"What did the king say to you? In the name of our friendship, do not deceive me! "—"The king has not said a word to me."

"You are killing me with impatience, M. d'Herblay. Am I still superintendent? "—"As long as you like."—"But what

extraordinary empire have you so suddenly acquired over his Majesty's mind?"—"Ah! that is it."—"You make him do as you like."—"I believe so."—"It is hardly credible."—"So any one would say."

"D'Herblay, by our alliance, by our friendship, by everything you hold the dearest in the world, speak openly, I implore you. By what means have you succeeded in overcoming Louis XIV.'s prejudices? He did not like you, I know."—"The king will like me *now*," said Aramis, laying a stress upon the last word.—"You and his Majesty have something particular, then, between you?"—"Yes."—"A secret, perhaps?"—"Yes, a secret."

"A secret of such a nature as to change his Majesty's interests?"—"You are indeed a man of superior intelligence, Monseigneur, and have made a very accurate guess. I have, in fact, discovered a secret of a nature to change the interests of the King of France."—"Ah!" said Fouquet, with the reserve of a man who does not wish to ask questions.—"And you shall judge of it yourself," pursued Aramis; "and you shall tell me if I am mistaken with regard to the importance of this secret."—"I am listening, since you are good enough to unbosom yourself to me; only do not forget that I have asked you nothing which may be indiscreet in you to communicate."

Aramis seemed for a moment as if he were collecting himself. "Do not speak!" said Fouquet; "there is still time enough."—"Do you remember," said the bishop, casting down his eyes, "the birth of Louis XIV.?"—"As it were yesterday."—"Have you ever heard anything particular respecting his birth?"—"Nothing; except that the king was not really the son of Louis XIII."

"That does not matter to us, or the kingdom either; he is the son of his father, says the French law, whose father is recognised by the law."—"True; but it is a grave matter when the quality of races is called into question."—"A merely secondary question, after all. So that, in fact, you have never learned or heard anything in particular?"—"Nothing."—"That is where my secret begins. The queen, you must know, instead of being delivered of one son, was delivered of two children."

Fouquet looked up suddenly as he replied, "And the second is dead?"—"You will see. These twins seemed likely to be regarded as the pride of their mother and the hope of France; but the weak nature of the king, his superstitious feelings, made

him apprehend a series of conflicts between two children whose rights were equal. He suppressed one of the twins."

"Suppressed, do you say?"—"Listen. Both the children grew up,—the one on the throne, whose minister you are; the other, who is my friend, in gloom and isolation."—"Good heavens! What are you saying, M. d'Herblay? And what is this poor prince doing?"—"Ask me, rather, what he has done."—"Yes, yes."—"He was brought up in the country, and then thrown into a fortress which goes by the name of the Bastille."—"Is it possible?" cried the superintendent, clasping his hands.

"The one was the most fortunate of men; the other the most unhappy of miserable beings."—"Does his mother not know this?"—"Anne of Austria knows it all."—"And the king?"—"Knows absolutely nothing."—"So much the better!" said Fouquet.

This remark seemed to make a great impression on Aramis; he looked at Fouquet with an anxious expression of countenance. "I beg your pardon; I interrupted you," said Fouquet.—"I was saying," resumed Aramis, "that this poor prince was the unhappiest of men, when God, whose thoughts are over all his creatures, undertook to come to his assistance."—"Oh! in what way?"

"You will see. The reigning king,—I say the reigning king: you can guess very well why?"—"No. Why?"—"Because being alike legitimately entitled from their birth, both ought to have been kings. Is not that your opinion?"—"It is, certainly."—"Unreservedly so?"—"Most unreservedly; twins are one person in two bodies."

"I am pleased that a legist of your learning and authority should have pronounced such an opinion. It is agreed, then, that both of them possessed the same rights, is it not?"—"Incontestably so! but, gracious heavens, what an extraordinary circumstance!"—"We are not at the end of it yet. Patience!"—"Oh, I shall find 'patience' enough."

"God wished to raise up for that oppressed child an avenger, or a supporter, if you prefer it. It happened that the reigning king, the usurper—you are quite of my opinion, are you not, that it is an act of usurpation for one quietly to enjoy, and selfishly to assume the right over, an inheritance of which at most only a half belongs to him?"—"Yes; usurpation is the word."—"I continue, then. It was God's will that the usurper should possess, in the person of his first minister, a man of great talent, of large and generous nature."

Digitized by Google

"Well, well," said Fouquet, "I understand; you ed over upon me to repair the wrong which has been d ke him unhappy brother of Louis XIV. You have thoug ble."— will help you. I thank you, D'Herblay, I thank yc no, it is not that at all; you have not allowed me by eve said Aramis, unmoved.—"I will not say another w y, I imp

"M. Fouquet, I was observing that the minis overcon reigning sovereign was suddenly regarded with the know. aversion, and menaced with the ruin of his fortune, wi ress u liberty, with loss of life, even, by intrigue and personal ing p to which the king gave too readily an attentive ear haps Heaven permits—still, however, out of consideration for the unhappy prince who had been sacrificed—that M. Fouquet should in his turn have a devoted friend who knew this state secret, and felt that he possessed strength and courage enough to divulge it, after having had the strength to carry it locked up in his own heart for twenty years."

"Do not go on any farther," said Fouquet, full of generous feelings. "I understand you, and can guess everything now. You went to see the king when the intelligence of my arrest reached you. You implored him; he refused to listen to you. Then you threatened him with the revelation of that secret; and Louis XIV., alarmed, granted to the fear of your indiscretion what he refused to your generous intercession. I understand, I understand: you have the king in your power; I understand."—"You understand nothing as yet," replied Aramis, "and again you have interrupted me. And then, too, allow me to observe that you pay no attention to logical reasoning, and seem to forget what you ought most to remember."

"What do you mean?"—"You know upon what I laid the greatest stress at the beginning of our conversation?"—"Yes, his majesty's hate, invincible hate, for me; yes, but what feeling of hate could resist the threat of such a revelation?"—"Such a revelation, do you say? that is the very point where your logic fails you. What! do you suppose that if I had made such a revelation to the king, I should have been alive now?"—"It is not ten minutes ago since you were with the king?"—"That may be. He might not have had the time to get me killed outright, but he would have had the time to get me gagged and thrown into a dungeon. Come, come! show a little consistency in your reasoning, *mordieu!*"

And by the mere use of this word of the musketeers, uncon-

sciously used by one who never seemed to forget anything, Fouquet could not but understand to what a pitch of exaltation the calm, impenetrable Bishop of Vannes had wrought himself. He shuddered at it.

"And then," replied the latter, after having mastered his feelings, "should I be the man I really am, should I be the true friend you consider me, if I were to expose you—you whom the king hates already bitterly enough—to a feeling still more than ever to be dreaded in that young man? To have robbed him is nothing; to have addressed the woman he loves is not much; but to hold in your keeping both his crown and his honour,—why, he would rather pluck out your heart with his own hands!"

"You have not allowed him to penetrate your secret, then?"—"I would sooner, far sooner, have swallowed at one draught all the poisons that Mithridates drank in twenty years in trying to avoid death."—"What have you done, then?"—"Ah, now we are coming to the point, Monseigneur! I think I shall not fail to excite a little interest in you. You are listening, I hope?"—"How can you ask me if I am listening? Go on."

Aramis walked softly all round the room, satisfied himself that they were alone and that all was silent, and then returned, and placed himself close to the arm-chair in which Fouquet awaited with the deepest anxiety the revelations he had to make. "I forgot to tell you," resumed Aramis, addressing himself to Fouquet, who listened to him with the most absorbed attention,—"I forgot to mention a most remarkable circumstance respecting these twins; namely, that God had formed them so like each other that he alone, if he should summon them to his tribunal, could distinguish the one from the other. Their own mother could not do it."—"Is it possible?" exclaimed Fouquet.

"The same noble character in their features, the same carriage, the same stature, the same voice."—"But their thoughts; degree of intelligence; their knowledge of human life?"—"There is inequality there, I admit, Monseigneur. Yes, for the prisoner of the Bastille is most incontestably superior in every way to his brother; and if from his prison this unhappy victim were to pass to the throne, France would not from the earliest period of its history, perhaps, have had a master more powerful by his genius and true nobleness of character." Fouquet buried his face in his hands, as if he were overwhelmed by the weight of this immense secret.

Digitized by Google

Aramis approached him. "There is a further inequality," he said, continuing his work of temptation,—"an inequality which concerns yourself, Monseigneur,—between the twins, sons of Louis XIII.; namely, the last-comer does not know M. Colbert."

Fouquet raised his head immediately; his features were pale and distorted. The bolt had hit its mark,—not his heart, but his mind and comprehension. "I understand you," he said to Aramis; "you are proposing a conspiracy to me?"—"Something like it."—"One of those attempts which, as you said at the beginning of this conversation, alter the fate of empires?"—"And of superintendents; yes, Monseigneur."—"In a word, you propose to me that I should assist in the substitution of the son of Louis XIII. who is now a prisoner in the Bastille for the son of Louis XIII. who is now at this moment asleep in the Chamber of Morpheus?" Aramis smiled with the sinister expression of his sinister thought. "Perhaps," he said.

"But," said Fouquet, after a painful silence, "you have not reflected that such a political enterprise must overturn the entire kingdom; and that after pulling up that widely-rooted tree that is called a king, to replace it by another, the earth around will never again become so firm that the new king may be secure against the wind that remains of the former tempest, and against the oscillations of his own bulk." Aramis continued to smile. "Have you thought," continued Fouquet, becoming animated with that power of genius which in a few seconds originates and matures the conception of a plan, and with that largeness of view which foresees all its consequences and embraces all its results,—"have you thought that we must assemble the nobility, the clergy, and the third estate of the realm; that we shall have to depose the reigning sovereign, to disturb by a frightful scandal the tomb of their dead father, to sacrifice the life, the honour, of a woman (Anne of Austria), the life and peace of another woman (Maria Theresa)? And suppose that all were done, if we were to succeed in doing it—"

"I do not understand you," continued Aramis, coldly. "There is not a single word of the slightest use in what you have just said."—"What!" said the superintendent, surprised; "a man like you refuse to view the practical bearings of the case? Do you confine yourself to the childish delight of a political illusion, and neglect the chances of fulfilment,—in other words, the reality? Is it possible?"

Digitized by Google

"My friend," said Aramis, emphasising the word with a kind of disdainful familiarity, "what does God do in order to substitute one king for another?"—"God!" exclaimed Fouquet,—"God gives directions to his agent, who seizes upon the doomed victim, hurries him away, and seats the triumphant rival on the empty throne. But you forget that this agent is called death. Oh, M. d'Herblay! in Heaven's name, tell me if you have had the idea—"

"There is no question of that, Monseigneur,—you are going beyond the object in view. Who spoke of Louis XIV.'s death; who spoke of adopting the example of God in the strict method of his works? No; I wish you to understand that God effects his purposes without confusion, without scandal, without effort, and that men inspired by God succeed like him in all their undertakings, in all they attempt, in all they do."—"What do you mean?"—"I mean, my friend," returned Aramis, with the same intonation on the word "friend" that he had applied to it the first time,—"I mean that if there has been any confusion, scandal, and even effort in the substitution of the prisoner for the king, I defy you to prove it."

"What!" cried Fouquet, whiter than the handkerchief with which he wiped his temples; "what do you say?"—"Go to the king's apartment," continued Aramis, tranquilly; "and you who know the mystery, I defy even you to perceive that the prisoner of the Bastille is lying in his brother's bed."—"But the king?" stammered Fouquet, seized with horror at the intelligence.—"What king?" said Aramis, in his gentlest tone; "the one who hates you, or the one who likes you?"—"The king—of yesterday?"—"The king of yesterday! Be quite easy on that score; he has gone to take the place in the Bastille which his victim has occupied for such a long time past."

"Great God! And who took him there?"—"I."—"You?"—"Yes, and in the simplest way. I carried him away last night; and while he was descending into gloom, the other was ascending into light. I do not think there has been any disturbance created in any way. A flash of lightning without thunder never awakens any one."

Fouquet uttered a thick, smothered cry, as if he had been struck by some invisible blow, and clasping his head between his clinched hands, he murmured, "you did that?"—"Cleverly enough, too; what do you think of it?"—"You have dethroned the king; you have imprisoned him?"—"It is done."—"And such an action was committed here at Vaux?"—"Yes; here

at Vaux, in the Chamber of Morpheus. It would almost seem that it had been built in anticipation of such an act."—"And at what time did it occur?"—"Last night, between twelve and one o'clock."

Fouquet made a movement as if he were on the point of springing upon Aramis; he restrained himself. "At Vaux; under my roof!" he said in a half-strangled voice.—"I believe so; for it is still your house, and is likely to continue so, since M. Colbert cannot rob you of it now."—"It was under my roof, then, Monsieur, that you committed this crime!"

"This crime!" said Aramis, stupefied.—"This abominable crime!" pursued Fouquet, becoming more and more excited; "this crime more execrable than an assassination; this crime which dishonours my name for ever, and entails upon me the horror of posterity!"—"You are not in your senses, Monsieur," replied Aramis, in an irresolute tone of voice; "you are speaking too loudly. Take care!"—"I will call out so loudly that the whole world shall hear me."—"M. Fouquet, take care!"

Fouquet turned round towards the prelate, whom he looked full in the face. "You have dishonoured me," he said, "in committing so foul an act of treason, so heinous a crime upon my guest, upon one who was peacefully reposing beneath my roof. Oh, woe, woe is me!"—"Woe to the man, rather, who beneath your roof meditated the ruin of your fortune, your life. Do you forget that?"—"He was my guest; he was my king!"

Aramis rose, his eyes literally bloodshot, his mouth trembling convulsively. "Have I a man out of his senses to deal with?" he said.—"You have an honourable man to deal with."—"You are mad!"—"A man who will prevent you from consummating your crime."—"You are mad!"—"A man who would sooner die, who would kill you even, rather than allow you to complete his dishonour."

And Fouquet snatched up his sword, which D'Artagnan had placed at the head of his bed, and clinched it resolutely in his hand. Aramis frowned, and thrust his hand into his breast, as if in search of a weapon. This movement did not escape Fouquet, who, noble and grand in his magnanimity, threw his sword to a distance from him, and approached Aramis so close as to touch his shoulder with his disarmed hand. "Monsieur," he said, "I would sooner die here on the spot than survive my disgrace; and if you have any pity left for me, I entreat you to take my life." Aramis remained silent and motionless. "You do not reply?" said Fouquet.

Digitized by Google

Aramis raised his head gently, and a glimmer of hope might be seen once more to animate his eyes. "Reflect, Monseigneur," he said, "upon everything we have to expect. As the matter now stands, the king is still alive, and his imprisonment saves your life."

"Yes," replied Fouquet, "you may have been acting on my behalf; but I do not accept your service. At the same time, I do not wish your ruin. You will leave this house." Aramis stifled the exclamation which almost escaped his broken heart. "I am hospitable towards all who are dwellers beneath my roof," continued Fouquet, with an air of inexpressible majesty; "you will not be more fatally lost than he whose ruin you have consummated."

"You will be so," said Aramis, in a hoarse, prophetic voice,—"you will be so, believe me."—"I accept the augury, M. d'Herblay; but nothing shall stop me. You will leave Vaux; you must leave France. I give you four hours to place yourself out of the king's reach."—"Four hours?" said the Bishop of Vannes, scornfully and incredulously.

"Upon the word of Fouquet, no one shall follow you before the expiration of that time. You will therefore have four hours' advance of those whom the king may wish to despatch after you."—"Four hours!" repeated Aramis, in a thick, smothered voice.

"It is more than you will need to get on board a vessel, and flee to Belle-Isle, which I give you as a place of refuge."—"Ah!" murmured Aramis.—"Belle-Isle is as much mine for you as Vaux is mine for the king. Go, D'Herblay, go! as long as I live, not a hair of your head shall be injured."—"Thank you," said Aramis, with a cold irony of manner.

"Go at once, then, and give me your hand, before we both hasten away,—you to save your life, I to save my honour."

Aramis withdrew from his breast the hand he had concealed there; it was stained with his blood. He had dug his nails into his flesh, as if in punishment for having nursed so many projects, more vain, insensate, and fleeting than the life of man. Fouquet was horror-stricken, and then his heart smote him with pity. He opened his arms to Aramis. "I had no weapons," murmured Aramis, as wild and terrible as the shade of Dido. And then, without touching Fouquet's hand, he turned his head aside, and stepped back a pace or two. His last word was an imprecation, his last gesture a curse, which his blood-stained hand seemed to invoke, as it sprinkled on

Fouquet's face a few drops of his blood; and both of them darted out of the room by the secret staircase which led down to the inner courtyard. Fouquet ordered his best horses, while Aramis paused at the foot of the staircase which led to Porthos's apartment. He reflected for some time, while Fouquet's carriage left the stone-paved courtyard at full gallop.

"Shall I go alone," said Aramis to himself, "or warn the prince? Oh, fury! Warn the prince, and then—do what? Take him with me? Carry this accusing witness about with me everywhere? War, too, would follow,—civil war, implacable in its nature! And without any resource—alas, it is impossible! What will he do without me? Without me he will be utterly destroyed! Yet who knows? let destiny be fulfilled! Condemned he was, let him remain so, then! God! Demon! Gloomy and scornful Power, whom men call the Genius of man, thou art only a breath, more uncertain, more useless, than the wind in the mountains! Chance thou term'st thyself, but thou art nothing; thou inflamest everything with thy breath, crumblest mountains at thy approach, and suddenly art thyself destroyed at the presence of the cross of dead wood, behind which stands another Power invisible like thyself,—whom thou deniest, perhaps, but whose avenging hand is on thee, and hurls thee in the dust dishonoured and unnamed! Lost! I am lost! What can be done? Flee to Belle-Isle? Yes, and leave Porthos behind me, to talk and relate the whole affair to every one,—Porthos, who will suffer, perhaps! I will not let poor Porthos suffer. He is one of the members of my own frame; his grief is mine. Porthos shall leave with me, and shall follow my destiny. It must be so." And Aramis, apprehensive of meeting any one to whom his hurried movements might appear suspicious, ascended the staircase without being perceived. Porthos, but just returned from Paris, slept already the sleep of the just; his huge body forgot its fatigue as his mind forgot its thoughts. Aramis entered, light as a shadow, and placed his nervous grasp on the giant's shoulder. "Come, Porthos," he cried, "come!"

Porthos obeyed, rose from his bed, and opened his eyes, even before opening his mind. "We are going off," said Aramis. —"Ah!" returned Porthos.—"We shall go mounted, and faster than we have ever gone in our lives."—"Ah!" repeated Porthos.—"Dress yourself, my friend."

And he helped the giant to dress himself, and thrust his gold and diamonds into his pocket. While he was thus engaged.

Digitized by Google

a slight noise attracted his attention, and he saw D'Artagnan looking at them from the open doorway. Aramis started.

"What the devil are you doing there in such an agitated manner?" said the musketeer.—"Hush!" said Porthos.—"We are going off on a mission," added the bishop.—"You are very fortunate," said the musketeer.—"Oh, dear me!" said Porthos, "I feel so wearied; I would much prefer to sleep. But the service of the king—"

"Have you seen M. Fouquet?" inquired Aramis of D'Artagnan.—"Yes; this very minute, in a carriage."—"What did he say to you?"—"He bade me adieu."—"Was that all?"—"What else do you think he could say? Am I worth anything now, since you have all got into such high favour?"

"Listen," said Aramis, embracing the musketeer; "your good times are returning again. "You will have no more occasion to be jealous of any one."—"Ah, bah!"—"I predict that something will happen to you to-day which will increase your importance."—"Really?"—"You know that I know all the news?"—"Oh, yes!"

"Come, Porthos, are you ready? Let us go."—"I am quite ready, Aramis."—"Let us embrace D'Artagnan first."—"*Pardieu!*"—"But the horses?"—"Oh! there is no want of them here. Will you have mine?"—"No; Porthos has his own stud. So adieu; adieu!"

The two fugitives mounted their horses beneath the eyes of the captain of the musketeers, who held Porthos's stirrup for him, and gazed after them until they were out of sight. "On any other occasion," thought the Gascon, "I should say that those gentlemen were making their escape; but in these days politics seem so changed that this is called going on a mission. I have no objection. Let me attend to my own affairs;" and he philosophically entered his apartments.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXVIII

HOW THE COUNTERSIGN WAS RESPECTED AT THE BASTILLE

FOUQUET tore along as fast as his horses could drag him. On the way he trembled with horror at the idea of what had just been revealed to him. "What must have been," he thought, "the youth of those extraordinary men, who, even as age is stealing fast upon them, still are able to conceive such plans, and to carry them out without flinching!"

At one moment he asked himself whether all that Aramis had just been recounting to him was not a dream only, and whether the fable itself was not the snare; so that when he should arrive at the Bastille he might find an order of arrest, which would send him to join the dethroned king. Strongly impressed with this idea, he gave certain sealed orders on his route, while fresh horses were harnessed to his carriage. These orders were addressed to M. d'Artagnan and to certain others whose fidelity to the king was far above suspicion. "In this way," said Fouquet to himself, "prisoner or not, I shall have performed the duty which I owe to my honour. The orders will not reach them until after my return, if I should return free, and consequently they will not have been unsealed. I shall then take them back again. If I am delayed, it will be because some misfortune will have befallen me; and in that case assistance will be sent for me as well as for the king."

Prepared in this manner, the superintendent arrived at the Bastille; he had travelled at the rate of five leagues and a half an hour. Every circumstance of delay which Aramis had escaped in his visit to the Bastille befell Fouquet. It was in vain that he gave his name, in vain that he endeavoured to be recognised; he could not succeed in obtaining an entrance. By dint of entreaties, threats, and commands, he succeeded in inducing a sentinel to speak to one of the subalterns, who went and told the major. As for the governor, they did not even dare to disturb him. Fouquet sat in his carriage, at the outer gate of the fortress, chafing with rage and impatience, awaiting the return of the officer, who at last reappeared with a somewhat sulky air. "Well," said Fouquet impatiently, "what did the major say?"—"Well, Monsieur," replied the soldier, "the major laughed in my face. He told me that M. Fouquet was at

Vaux, and that even were he at Paris, M. Fouquet would not rise at so early an hour as the present."

"*Mordieu!* you are a set of fools," cried the minister, darting out of the carriage; and before the subaltern had had time to shut the gate, Fouquet sprang through it, and ran forward in spite of the soldier, who cried out for assistance. Fouquet gained ground, regardless of the cries of the man, who however, having at last come up with Fouquet, called out to the sentinel of the second gate, "Look out, look out, sentinel!" The man crossed his pike before the minister; but the latter, robust and active, and carried away too by his passion, wrested the pike from the soldier, and struck him a violent blow on the shoulder with it. The subaltern, who approached too closely, received his part of the blows as well. Both of them uttered loud and furious cries, at the sound of which the whole of the first body of the advanced guard poured out of the guard-house. Among them there was one, however, who recognised the superintendent, and who called out, "Monseigneur! ah, Monseigneur! Stop, stop, you fellows!" and he effectually checked the soldiers, who were on the point of avenging their companions. Fouquet desired them to open the gate; but they refused to do so without the countersign. He desired them to inform the governor of his presence; but the latter had already heard the disturbance at the gate. He ran forward, followed by his major, and accompanied by a picket of twenty men, persuaded that an attack was being made on the Bastille. Baisemeaux also recognised Fouquet immediately, and dropped his sword, which he had held brandishing about in his hand.

"Ah, Monseigneur!" he stammered, "how can I excuse—"

—"Monsieur," said the superintendent, flushed with anger, and heated by his exertions, "I congratulate you. Your watch and ward are admirably kept." Baisemeaux turned pale, thinking that this remark was said ironically, and portended a furious burst of anger. But Fouquet had recovered his breath, and beckoning towards him the sentinel and the subaltern, who were rubbing their shoulders, he said, "There are twenty pistoles for the sentinel, and fifty for the officer. Pray receive my compliments, gentlemen. I will not fail to speak to his Majesty about you. And now, M. Baisemeaux, a word with you."

And he followed the governor to his official residence, accompanied by a murmur of general satisfaction. Baisemeaux was already trembling with shame and uneasiness. Aramis's early visit from that moment seemed to involve consequences which

Digitized by Google

a functionary was justified in apprehending. It was quite another thing, however, when Fouquet, in a sharp tone of voice, and with an imperious look, said, "You have seen M. d'Herblay this morning?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."—"And are you not horrified at the crime of which you have made yourself an accomplice?"—"Well," thought Baisemeaux, "good so far;" and then he added aloud, "But what crime, Monseigneur, do you allude to?"—"That for which you can be quartered alive, Monsieur,—do not forget that! But this is not a time to show anger. Conduct me immediately to the prisoner."—"To what prisoner?" said Baisemeaux, tremblingly.

"You pretend to be ignorant! Very good; it is the best thing for you to do,—for if, in fact, you were to admit your participation in it, it would be all over with you. I wish, therefore, to seem to believe in your assumption of ignorance."—"I entreat you, Monseigneur—"—"That will do. Lead me to the prisoner."—"To Marchiali?"—"Who is Marchiali?"—"The prisoner who was brought back this morning by M. d'Herblay."—"He is called Marchiali?" said the superintendent, his conviction somewhat shaken by Baisemeaux's cool manner.—"Yes, Monseigneur; that is the name under which he was inscribed here."

Fouquet looked steadily at Baisemeaux, as if to read his very heart, and perceived, with that clear-sightedness which men possess who are accustomed to the exercise of power, that the man was speaking with absolute sincerity. Besides, on observing his face for a moment, he could not believe that Aramis would have chosen such a confidant.

"It is the prisoner," said the superintendent to Baisemeaux, "whom M. d'Herblay carried away the day before yesterday?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"And whom he brought back this morning?" added Fouquet, quickly, for he understood immediately the mechanism of Aramis's plan.—"Precisely, Monseigneur."

"And his name is Marchiali, you say?"—"Yes; Marchiali. If Monseigneur has come here to remove him, so much the better, for I was going to write about him."—"What has he done, then?"—"Ever since this morning, he has annoyed me extremely. He has had such terrible fits of passion as almost to make me believe that he would bring the Bastille itself down about our ears."—"I will soon relieve you of his presence," said Fouquet.—"Ah! so much the better."

Digitized by Google

"Conduct me to his prison."—"Will Monseigneur give me the order?"—"What order?"—"An order from the king."—"Wait until I sign you one."—"That will not be sufficient, Monseigneur; I must have an order from the king."

Fouquet assumed an irritated expression. "As you are so scrupulous," he said, "with regard to allowing prisoners to leave, show me the order by which this one was set at liberty." Baisemeaux showed him the order to release Seldon. "Very good," said Fouquet; "but Seldon is not Marchiali."—"But Marchiali is not at liberty; he is here."—"But you said that M. d'Herblay carried him away and brought him back again."—"I did not say so."—"So surely did you say it that I almost seem to hear it now."—"It was a slip of my tongue, then, Monseigneur."—"Take care, M. Baisemeaux, take care!"

"I have nothing to fear, Monseigneur; I am acting according to strict regulation."—"Do you dare to say so?"—"I would say so in the presence of an apostle. M. d'Herblay brought me an order to set Seldon at liberty; and Seldon is free."—"I tell you that Marchiali has left the Bastille."—"You must prove that, Monseigneur."—"Let me see him."—"You, Monseigneur, who govern in this kingdom, know very well that no one can see any of the prisoners without an express order from the king."

"M. d'Herblay has entered, however."—"That is to be proved, Monseigneur."—"M. de Baisemeaux, once more I warn you to pay particular attention to what you are saying."—"All the documents are there, Monseigneur."—"M. d'Herblay is overthrown."—"Overthrown,—M. d'Herblay? Impossible!"—"You see that he has influenced you."—"What influences me, Monseigneur, is the king's service. I am doing my duty. Give me an order from him, and you shall enter."

"Stay, Monsieur the Governor! I give you my word that if you allow me to see the prisoner I will give you an order from the king at once."—"Give it to me now, Monseigneur."—"And that if you refuse me I will have you and all your officers arrested on the spot."—"Before you commit such an act of violence, Monseigneur, you will reflect," said Baisemeaux, who had turned very pale, "that we will only obey an order signed by the king; and that it will be just as easy for you to obtain one to see Marchiali as to obtain one to do so much injury to me, who am innocent."

"True, true!" cried Fouquet, furiously,—"perfectly true! M. de Baisemeaux," he added in a sonorous voice, drawing the unhappy governor towards him, "do you know why I am so

Digitized by Google

anxious to speak to the prisoner?"—"No, Monseigneur; and please observe that you are terrifying me. I tremble, and feel as if I were going to faint."

"You will faint outright, M. Baisemeaux, when I return here at the head of ten thousand men and thirty pieces of cannon."—"Good heavens, Monseigneur! you are losing your senses!"—"When I have roused the whole population of Paris against you and your cursed towers, and have battered open the gates of this place, and hanged you up to the bars of that tower in the corner there."—"Monseigneur, Monseigneur! for pity's sake!"—"I will give you ten minutes to make up your mind," added Fouquet, in a calm voice. "I will sit down here in this arm-chair and wait for you. If in ten minutes' time you still persist, I will leave this place, and you may think me as mad as you like; but you will see!"

Baisemeaux stamped his foot on the ground like a man in a state of despair, but he did not utter a word; whereupon Fouquet seized a pen and ink, and wrote,—

"Order for M. le Prévôt des Marchands to assemble the municipal guard, and to march upon the Bastille for the king's service."

Baisemeaux shrugged his shoulders. Fouquet wrote:

"Order for M. le Duc de Bouillon and M. le Prince de Condé to assume the command of the Swiss and of the Guards, and to march upon the Bastille for the king's service."

Baisemeaux reflected. Fouquet still wrote:—

"Order for every soldier, citizen, or gentleman to seize and apprehend, wherever he may be found, the Chevalier d'Herblay, Evêque de Vannes, and his accomplices, who are—first, M. de Baisemeaux, governor of the Bastille, suspected of the crimes of high treason and rebellion—"

"Stop, Monseigneur!" cried Baisemeaux. "I understand absolutely nothing of the whole matter; but so many misfortunes, even were it madness itself that had set them at work, might happen here in a couple of hours that the king, by whom I shall be judged, will see whether I have been wrong in withdrawing the countersign before so many imminent catastrophes. Come with me to the keep, Monseigneur; you shall see Marchiali." Fouquet darted out of the room, followed by Baisemeaux wiping the perspiration from his face. "What a terrible

morning!" he said; "what a disgrace!"—"Walk faster!" replied Fouquet.

Baisemeaux made a sign to the jailer to precede them. He was afraid of his companion,—which the latter could not fail to perceive. "A truce to this child's-play!" said Fouquet, roughly. "Let the man remain here; take the keys yourself, and show me the way. Not a single person, do you understand, must hear what is going to take place here."—"Ah!" said Baisemeaux, undecided.—"Again," cried Fouquet. "Ah! say 'No' at once, and I will leave the Bastille, and will myself carry my own despatches."

Baisemeaux bowed his head, took the keys, and unaccompanied except by the minister, ascended the staircase. As they advanced up the spiral staircase, certain smothered murmurs became distinct cries and fearful imprecations. "What is that?" asked Fouquet.—"That is your Marchiali," said the governor; "that is the way madmen howl." And he accompanied that reply with a glance more indicative of injurious allusions, as far as Fouquet was concerned, than of politeness.

The latter trembled; he had just recognised, in one cry more terrible than any that had preceded it, the king's voice. He paused on the staircase, trying to snatch the bunch of keys from Baisemeaux, who thought this new madman was going to dash out his brains with one of them. "Give me the keys at once!" cried Fouquet, tearing them from his hand. "Which is the key of the door I am to open?"—"That one."

A fearful cry, followed by a violent blow against the door, made the whole staircase resound with the echo. "Leave this place!" said Fouquet to Baisemeaux, in a threatening voice.—"I ask nothing better," murmured the latter. "There will be a couple of madmen face to face; and the one will kill the other, I am sure."—"Go!" repeated Fouquet. "If you place your foot on this staircase before I call you, remember that you shall take the place of the meanest prisoner in the Bastille."—"This job will kill me, I am sure!" muttered Baisemeaux, as he withdrew with tottering steps.

The prisoner's cries became more and more terrible. When Fouquet had satisfied himself that Baisemeaux had reached the bottom of the staircase, he inserted the key in the first lock. It was then that he heard the hoarse, choking voice of the king crying out in a frenzy of rage, "Help, help! I am the king!" The key of the second door was not the same as the first, and Fouquet was obliged to look for it on the bunch. The king,

meanwhile, furious and almost mad with rage and passion, shouted at the top of his voice, "It was M. Fouquet who brought me here! help me against M. Fouquet! I am the king! help the king against M. Fouquet!" These cries tore the minister's heart with mingled emotions. They were followed by frightful blows levelled against the door with a part of the broken chair with which the king had armed himself. Fouquet at last succeeded in finding the key. The king was almost exhausted; he no longer articulated, he roared: "Death to Fouquet! Death to the traitor Fouquet!" The door flew open.

CHAPTER CCXXIX

THE KING'S GRATITUDE

THE two men were on the point of darting towards each other, when they suddenly stopped, as a mutual recognition took place, and each uttered a cry of horror. "Have you come to assassinate me, Monsieur?" said the king, when he recognised Fouquet.—"The king in this state!" murmured the minister.

Nothing could be more terrible, indeed, than the appearance of Louis at the moment Fouquet had surprised him; his clothes were in tatters; his shirt, open and torn to rags, was stained with sweat, and with the blood which streamed from his lacerated breast and arms. Haggard, pale, foaming, his hair dishevelled, Louis XIV. presented a vivid picture of despair, hunger, and fear, combined in one figure. Fouquet was so touched, so affected and disturbed, that he ran to the king with his arms stretched out and his eyes filled with tears. Louis held up the massive piece of wood of which he had made such a furious use.

"Sire," said Fouquet, in a voice trembling with emotion, "do you not recognise the most faithful of your friends?"—"A friend,—you!" repeated Louis, gnashing his teeth in a manner which betrayed his hate and desire for speedy vengeance.—"The most respectful of your servants," added Fouquet, throwing himself on his knees. The king let the rude weapon fall from his grasp. Fouquet approached him, kissed his knees, and took him tenderly in his arms. "My king, my child," he said, "how you must have suffered!"

Louis, recalled to himself by the change of situation, looked

at himself, and ashamed of his disordered state, ashamed of his conduct, ashamed of the protection he was receiving, drew back. Fouquet did not understand this movement; he did not perceive that the king's pride would never forgive him for having been a witness of so much weakness. "Come, Sire," he said, "you are free."

"Free?" repeated the king. "Oh! you set me at liberty, then, after having dared to lift up your hand against me?"—"You do not believe that!" exclaimed Fouquet, indignantly; "you cannot believe me to be guilty of such an act."

And rapidly, warmly even, he related the whole particulars of the intrigue, the details of which are already known to the reader. While the recital continued, Louis suffered the most horrible anguish of mind; and when it was finished, the magnitude of the danger he had run struck him far more than the importance of the secret relating to his twin brother. "Monsieur," he said suddenly to Fouquet, "this double birth is a falsehood; you cannot have been deceived by it."—"Sire!"—"It is impossible, I tell you, that the honour, the virtue of my mother can be suspected. And my first minister, has he not already done justice on the criminals?"

"Reflect, Sire, before you are carried away by your anger," replied Fouquet. "The birth of your brother—"—"I have only one brother; and that is *Monsieur*. You know it as well as myself. There is a plot, I tell you, beginning with the governor of the Bastille."

"Be careful, Sire, for this man has been deceived as every one else has by the prince's likeness to yourself."—"Likeness? absurd!"—"This Marchiali must, however, be very like your Majesty to be able to deceive every one," Fouquet persisted.—"Ridiculous!"—"Do not say so, Sire; those who had prepared everything in order to face and deceive your ministers, your mother, your officers of state, the members of your family, must be quite confident of the resemblance between you."

"There is truth in that," murmured the king; "but where are these persons, then?"—"At Vaux."—"At Vaux! and you suffer them to remain there?"—"My most pressing duty seemed to be your Majesty's release. I have accomplished that duty; and now whatever your Majesty may command, shall be done. I await your orders."

Louis reflected for a few minutes. "Muster all the troops in Paris," he said.—"All the necessary orders are given for that purpose," replied Fouquet.—"You have given orders?"

exclaimed the king.—"For that purpose,—yes, Sire! your Majesty will be at the head of ten thousand men in an hour."

The only reply the king made was to take hold of Fouquet's hand with such an expression of feeling that it was very easy to perceive how strongly he had until that remark maintained his suspicions of the minister, notwithstanding the latter's intervention. "And with these troops," he said, "we shall go at once and besiege in your house the rebels who by this time will have established and intrenched themselves there."—"I should be surprised if that were the case," replied Fouquet.—"Why?"—"Because their chief,—the very soul of the enterprise,—having been unmasked by me, the whole plan seems to me to have miscarried."

"You have unmasked this false prince also?"—"No, I have not seen him."—"Whom have you seen, then?"—"The leader of the enterprise is not that unhappy young man; the latter is merely an instrument, destined through his whole life to wretchedness, I plainly perceive."—"Most certainly."—"It is M. l'Abbé d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes."

"Your friend?"—"He was my friend, Sire," replied Fouquet, nobly.—"An unfortunate circumstance for you," said the king, in a less generous tone of voice.—"Such friendship, Sire, had nothing dishonourable in it so long as I was ignorant of the crime."

"You should have foreseen it."—"If I am guilty, I place myself in your Majesty's hands."—"Ah, M. Fouquet, it was not that I meant," returned the king, sorry to have shown the bitterness of his thought in such a manner. "Well; I assure you that notwithstanding the mask with which the villain covered his face, I had something like a vague suspicion that it might be he. But with this chief of the enterprise there was a man of prodigious strength; the one who menaced me with a force almost herculean, what is he?"

"It must be his friend the Baron du Vallon, formerly one of the musketeers."—"The friend of D'Artagnan; the friend of the Comte de la Fère? Ah!" exclaimed the king, as he paused at the name of the latter, "we must not forget that connection between the conspirators and M. de Bragelonne."

"Sire, Sire, do not go too far! M. de la Fère is the most honourable man in France. Be satisfied with those whom I deliver up to you."—"With those whom you deliver up to me, you say? Very good, for you will deliver up those who are guilty to me."—"What does your Majesty understand by

Digitized by Google

that?" inquired Fouquet.—"I understand," replied the king, "that we shall soon arrive at Vaux with a large body of troops, that we will lay violent hands upon that nest of vipers, and that not a soul shall escape."

"Your Majesty will put these men to death?" cried Fouquet. —"To the very meanest of them."—"Oh, Sire!"—"Let us understand each other, M. Fouquet," said the king, haughtily. "We no longer live in times when assassination was the only, the last resource of kings. No, Heaven be praised! I have parliaments who judge in my name, and I have scaffolds on which my supreme will is executed."

Fouquet turned pale. "I will take the liberty of observing to your Majesty that any proceedings instituted respecting these matters would bring down the greatest scandal upon the dignity of the throne. The august name of Anne of Austria must never be allowed to pass the lips of the people accompanied by a smile."—"Justice must be done, however, Monsieur."—"Good, Sire; but the royal blood cannot be shed on a scaffold."

"The royal blood! you believe that?" cried the king, with fury in his voice, stamping on the ground. "This double birth is an invention; and in that invention particularly do I see M. d'Herblay's crime. That is the crime I wish to punish, rather than their violence or their insult."—"And punish it with death, Sire?"—"With death! yes, Monsieur."

"Sire," said the superintendent, with firmness, as he raised his head proudly, "your Majesty will take the life, if you please, of your brother Philippe of France; that concerns you alone, and you will doubtless consult the queen-mother upon the subject. Whatever she may order will be ordered well. I do not wish to mix myself up in it, not even for the honour of your crown; but I have a favour to ask of you, and I beg to submit it to you."—"Speak," said the king, in no little degree agitated by his minister's last words. "What do you require?" —"The pardon of M. d'Herblay and of M. du Vallon."—"My assassins?"—"Two rebels, Sire; that is all."

"Oh! I understand, then, you ask me to forgive your friends." —"My friends!" said Fouquet, deeply wounded.—"Your friends, certainly; but the safety of the State requires that an exemplary punishment should be inflicted on the guilty."

"I will not permit myself to remind your Majesty that I have just restored you to liberty, and have saved your life."— "Monsieur!"—"I will only remind your Majesty that had

M. d'Herblay wished to play the part of an assassin, he could very easily have assassinated your Majesty this morning in the forest of Sénart, and all would have been over."

The king started. "A pistol-bullet through the head," pursued Fouquet, "and the disfigured features of Louis XIV., which no one could have recognised, would have been M. d'Herblay's complete absolution." The king turned pale with fear at the idea of the danger he had escaped. "If M. d'Herblay," continued Fouquet, "had been an assassin, he had no occasion to inform me of his plan in order to succeed. Freed from the real king, it would have been impossible to guess the false one. And if the usurper had been recognised by Anne of Austria, he would still have been a son for her. The usurper, so far as M. d'Herblay's conscience was concerned, was still a king of the blood of Louis XIII. Moreover, the conspirator in that course would have had security, secrecy, and impunity. A pistol-bullet would have procured him all that. For the sake of Heaven, Sire, grant me his forgiveness!"

The king, instead of being touched by that picture, so faithful in all its details, of Aramis's generosity, felt himself painfully humiliated. His unconquerable pride revolted at the idea that a man had held suspended at the end of his finger the thread of his royal life. Every word which Fouquet thought would be efficacious in procuring his friend's pardon, carried another drop of poison to the already rankling heart of Louis XIV. Nothing could bend him. Addressing himself to Fouquet, he said, "I really don't know, Monsieur, why you should solicit the pardon of these men. What good is there in asking that which can be obtained without solicitation?"

"I do not understand you, Sire."—"It is not difficult either. Where am I now?"—"In the Bastille, Sire."—"Yes; in a dungeon. I am looked upon as a madman, am I not?"—"Yes, Sire."—"And no one is known here but Marchiali?"—"Certainly."—"Well; change nothing in the position of affairs. Let the madman rot in the dungeon of the Bastille, and M. d'Herblay and M. du Vallon will stand in no need of my forgiveness. Their new king will absolve them."

"Your Majesty does me a great injustice, Sire; and you are wrong," replied Fouquet, dryly. "I am not child enough, nor is M. d'Herblay silly enough, to have omitted to make all these reflections; and if I had wished to make a new king, as you say, I had no occasion to have come here to force open all the gates and doors of the Bastille, to free you from this place.

That would show a want of common-sense even. Your Majesty's mind is disturbed by anger; otherwise you would be far from offending groundlessly the very one of your servants who has rendered you the most important service of all."

Louis perceived that he had gone too far, that the gates of the Bastille were still closed upon him; while, by degrees, the floodgates were gradually being opened behind which the generous-hearted Fouquet had restrained his anger. "I did not say that to humiliate you, Heaven knows, Monsieur," he replied. "Only you are addressing yourself to me in order to obtain a pardon, and I answer you according as my conscience dictates. And so, judging by my conscience, the criminals we speak of are not worthy of consideration of forgiveness." Fouquet was silent. "What I do is as generous," added the king, "as what you have done, for I am in your power. I will even say, it is more generous, inasmuch as you place before me certain conditions upon which my liberty, my life, may depend, and to reject which is to make a sacrifice of them both."

"I was wrong, certainly," replied Fouquet. "Yes; I had the appearance of extorting a favour. I regret it, and entreat your Majesty's forgiveness."—"And you are forgiven, my dear M. Fouquet," said the king, with a smile which restored the serene expression of his features, which so many circumstances had altered since the preceding evening.

"I have my own forgiveness," replied the minister, with some degree of persistence; "but M. d'Herblay and M. du Vallon?"—"They will never obtain theirs as long as I live," replied the inflexible king. "Do me the kindness not to speak of it again."—"Your Majesty shall be obeyed."

"And you will bear me no ill-will for it?"—"Oh, no, Sire,—for I anticipated it."—"You had 'anticipated' that I should refuse to forgive those gentlemen?"—"Certainly; and all my measures were taken in consequence."—"What do you mean to say?" cried the king, surprised.

"M. d'Herblay came, so to speak, to deliver himself into my hands. M. d'Herblay left to me the happiness of saving my king and my country. I could not condemn M. d'Herblay to death; nor could I, on the other hand, expose him to your Majesty's most justifiable wrath,—it would have been just the same as if I had killed him myself."—"Well; and what have you done?"—"Sire, I gave M. d'Herblay the best horses in my stables, and four hours' start over those your Majesty will despatch after him."

Digitized by Google

"Be it so!" murmured the king. "But still, the world is large enough for those whom I may send to overtake your horses, notwithstanding the 'four hours' start' which you have given to M. d'Herblay."—"In giving him those four hours, Sire, I knew I was giving him his life; and he will save his life."—"In what way?"—"After having galloped as hard as possible, with the four hours' start over your musketeers, he will reach my château of Belle-Isle, where I have given him a safe asylum."

"That may be! but you forget that you have made me a present of Belle-Isle."—"But not for you to arrest my friends."—"You take it back again, then?"—"As far as that goes,—yes, Sire."—"My musketeers will capture it, and the affair will be at an end."—"Neither your musketeers nor your whole army could take Belle-Isle," said Fouquet, coldly. "Belle-Isle is impregnable."

The king became livid; a lightning flash darted from his eyes. Fouquet felt that he was lost, but he was not one to shrink when the voice of honour spoke loudly within him. He bore the king's wrathful gaze; the latter swallowed his rage, and after a few moments' silence, said, "Are we going to return to Vaux?"—"I am at your Majesty's orders," replied Fouquet, with a low bow; "but I think that your Majesty can hardly dispense with changing your clothes previous to appearing before your court."

"We shall pass by the Louvre," said the king. "Come." And they left the prison, passing before Baisemeaux, who looked completely bewildered, as he saw Marchiali once more leave, and in his helplessness tore out the few remaining hairs he had left. It is true that Fouquet wrote and gave him an authority for the prisoner's release, and that the king wrote beneath it, "Seen and approved, Louis,"—a piece of madness that Baisemeaux, incapable of putting two ideas together, acknowledged by giving himself a terrible blow with his fist on his jaws.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXX

THE FALSE KING

In the meantime, usurped royalty was playing out its part bravely at Vaux. Philippe gave orders that for his *petit lever*, the *grandes entrées*, already prepared to appear before the king, should be introduced. He determined to give this order notwithstanding the absence of M. d'Herblay, who did not return, —and our readers know for what reason. But the prince, not believing that that absence could be prolonged, wished, as all rash spirits do, to try his valour and his fortune independently of all protection and all counsel. Another reason urged him to this,—Anne of Austria was about to appear; the guilty mother was about to stand in the presence of her sacrificed son. Philippe was not willing, if he should betray any weakness, to render the man a witness of it before whom he was bound henceforth to display so much strength.

Philippe opened his folding-doors, and several persons entered silently. Philippe did not stir while his *valets de chambre* dressed him. He had watched, the evening before, all the habits of his brother, and played the king in such a manner as to awaken no suspicion. He was then completely dressed in his hunting costume when he received his visitors. His own memory and the notes of Aramis announced everybody to him, first of all Anne of Austria, to whom Monsieur gave his hand, and then Madame with M. de Saint-Aignan. He smiled at seeing these countenances, but trembled on recognising his mother. That figure so noble, so imposing, ravaged by pain, pleaded in his heart the cause of that famous queen who had immolated a child to reasons of state. He found his mother still handsome. He knew that Louis XIV. loved her; and he promised himself to love her likewise, and not to prove a cruel chastisement for her old age. He contemplated his brother with a tenderness easily to be understood. The latter had usurped nothing over him, had cast no shade over his life; a separate branch, he allowed the stem to rise without heeding its elevation or the majesty of its life. Philippe promised himself to be a kind brother to this prince, who required nothing but gold to minister to his pleasures. He bowed with a friendly air to De Saint-Aignan, who was all reverences and smiles, and tremblingly

held out his hand to Henrietta, his sister-in-law, whose beauty struck him; but he saw in her eyes an expression of coldness which would facilitate, as he thought, their future relations. "How much more easy," thought he, "it will be to be the brother of that woman than her gallant, if she evinces towards me a coldness that my brother could not have for her, and which is imposed upon me as a duty." The only visit he dreaded at this moment was that of the queen; his heart, his mind, had just been shaken by so violent a trial that in spite of their firm temperament they would not, perhaps, support another shock. Happily the queen did not come.

Then began, on the part of Anne of Austria, a political dissertation upon the welcome M. Fouquet had given to the house of France. She mixed up hostilities with compliments addressed to the king, and questions as to his health with little maternal flatteries and diplomatic artifices. "Well, my son," said she, "are you convinced with regard to M. Fouquet?"

"Saint-Aignan," said Philippe, "have the goodness to go and inquire after the queen." At these words, the first which Philippe had pronounced aloud, the slight difference that there was between his voice and that of the king was sensible to maternal ears, and Anne of Austria looked earnestly at her son. De Saint-Aignan left the room, and Philippe continued, "Madame, I do not like to hear M. Fouquet ill-spoken of,—you know I do not; and you have even spoken well of him yourself."—"That is true; therefore I only question you on the state of your sentiments with respect to him."

"Sire," said Henrietta, "I, on my part, have always liked M. Fouquet. He is a man of good taste; he is a superior man."—"A superintendent who is never sordid or niggardly," added Monsieur, "and who pays in gold all the orders I have on him."—"Every one in this thinks too much of himself, and nobody for the State," said the old queen. "M. Fouquet—it is a fact—M. Fouquet is ruining the State."

"Well, mother," replied Philippe, in rather a lower key, "do you likewise constitute yourself the buckler of M. Colbert?"—"How is that?" replied the old queen, rather surprised.—"Why, in truth," replied Philippe, "you speak that just as your old friend Madame de Chevreuse would speak."

At that name Anne of Austria turned pale and bit her lips. Philippe had irritated the lioness. "Why do you mention Madame de Chevreuse to me?" said she; "and what sort of humour are you in to-day towards me?" Philippe continued:

Digitized by Google

"Is not Madame de Chevreuse always in league against somebody? Has not Madame de Chevreuse been to pay you a visit, mother?"—"Monsieur, you speak to me now in such a manner that I can almost fancy I am listening to your father."

"My father did not like Madame de Chevreuse, and with good reason," said the prince. "For my part, I like her no better than he did; and if she thinks proper to come here as she formerly did, to sow divisions and hatreds under the pretext of begging money, why—"—"Well, what?" said Anne of Austria, proudly, herself provoking the storm.—"Well," replied the young man, firmly, "I will drive Madame de Chevreuse out of my kingdom,—and with her all who meddle with secrets and mysteries."

He had not calculated the effect of this terrible speech, or perhaps he wished to judge of the effect of it,—like those who suffering from a chronic pain, and seeking to break the monotony of that suffering, touch their wound to procure a sharper pang. Anne of Austria was near fainting. Her eyes, open but meaningless, ceased to see for several seconds; she stretched out her arms towards her other son, who supported and embraced her without fear of irritating the king. "Sire," murmured she, "you treat your mother cruelly."

"In what, Madame?" replied he. "I am only speaking of Madame de Chevreuse; does my mother prefer Madame de Chevreuse to the security of the State and to the security of my person? Well, then, Madame, I tell you Madame de Chevreuse is returned to France to borrow money, and that she addressed herself to M. Fouquet to sell him a certain secret."—"'A certain secret'!" cried Anne of Austria.—"Concerning pretended robberies that monsieur the superintendent had committed; which is false," added Philippe. "M. Fouquet rejected her offers with indignation, preferring the esteem of the king to all complicity with intriguers. Then Madame de Chevreuse sold the secret to M. Colbert; and as she is insatiable, and was not satisfied with having extorted a hundred thousand crowns from that clerk, she has sought still higher, and has endeavoured to find still deeper springs. Is that true, Madame?—"You know all, Sire," said the queen, more uneasy than irritated.

"Now," continued Philippe, "I have good reason to dislike this fury, who comes to my court to plan the dishonour of some and the ruin of others. If God has suffered certain crimes to be committed, and has concealed them in the shade of his clemency,

Digitized by Google

I will not permit Madame de Chevreuse to have the power to counteract the designs of God."

The latter part of this speech had so agitated the queen-mother that her son had pity on her. He took her hand and kissed it tenderly; she did not perceive that in that kiss, given in spite of repulsions and bitternesses of the heart, there was a pardon for eight years of horrible suffering. Philippe allowed the silence of a moment to swallow the emotions that had just developed themselves. Then, with a cheerful smile, "We will not go to-day," said he; "I have a plan." And turning towards the door, he hoped to see Aramis, whose absence began to alarm him. The queen-mother wished to leave the room. "Remain, mother," said he; "I wish you to make your peace with M. Fouquet."—"I bear no ill-will towards M. Fouquet; I only dreaded his prodigalities."—"We will put that to rights, and will take nothing of the superintendent but his good qualities."

"What is your Majesty looking for?" said Henrietta, seeing the prince's eyes constantly turned towards the door, and wishing to let fly a little poisoned arrow at his heart,—for she supposed he was expecting La Vallière or a letter from her. —"My sister," said the young man, who had divined her thought, thanks to that marvellous perspicuity of which fortune was from that time about to allow him the exercise,—"my sister, I am expecting a most distinguished man, a most able counsellor, whom I wish to present to you all, recommending him to your good graces— Ah! come in, then, D'Artagnan."

"What does your Majesty wish?" said D'Artagnan, appearing.—"Where is M. l'Evêque de Vannes, your friend?"—"Why, Sire—"—"I am waiting for him, and he does not come. Let him be sought for."

D'Artagnan remained for an instant stupefied; but soon, reflecting that Aramis had left Vaux secretly with a mission from the king, he concluded that the king wished to preserve the secret of it, "Sire," replied he, "does your Majesty absolutely require M. d'Herblay to be brought to you?"—"Absolutely is not the word," said Philippe,—"I do not want him so particularly as that; but if he can be found—"—"I thought so," said D'Artagnan to himself.

"Is this M. d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes?" said Anne of Austria.—"Yes, Madame."—"A friend of M. Fouquet?"—"Yes, Madame, an old musketeer." Anne of Austria blushed. "One of the four braves who formerly performed such wonders."

The old queen repented of having wished to bite; she broke off the conversation, in order to preserve the rest of her teeth. "Whatever may be your choice, Sire," said she, "I have no doubt it will be excellent." All bowed in support of that sentiment.

"You will find in him," continued Philippe, "the depth and penetration of M. de Richelieu, without the avarice of M. de Mazarin!"—"A prime minister, Sire?" said Monsieur, in a fright.—"I will tell you all about that, brother; but it is strange that M. d'Herblay is not here!" He called out, "Let M. Fouquet be informed that I wish to speak to him— Oh, before you, before you; do not retire!"

M. de Saint-Aignan returned, bringing satisfactory news of the queen, who only kept her bed from precaution, and to have strength to carry out all the king's wishes. While some were seeking M. Fouquet and Aramis, Philippe quietly continued his experiments, and no one of the family, officers, or servants had the least suspicion; his air, voice, and manners were so like the king's. On his side, Philippe, applying to all countenances the faithful description furnished by his accomplice Aramis, conducted himself so as not to give birth to a doubt in the minds of those who surrounded him.

Nothing from that time could disturb the usurper. With what strange facility had Providence just reversed the most elevated fortune of the world to substitute the most humble in its stead! Philippe admired the goodness of God with regard to himself, and seconded it with all the resources of his admirable nature. But he felt at times something like a shadow gliding between him and the rays of his new glory. Aramis did not appear. The conversation had languished in the royal family; Philippe, preoccupied, forgot to dismiss his brother and Madame Henrietta. The latter were astonished, and began by degrees to lose all patience. Anne of Austria stooped towards her son's ear, and addressed some words to him in Spanish. Philippe was completely ignorant of that language, and grew pale at this unexpected obstacle. But as if the spirit of the imperturbable Aramis had covered him with his infallibility, instead of appearing disconcerted, Philippe rose. "Well! what?" said Anne of Austria.

"What is all that noise?" said Philippe, turning round towards the door of the second staircase. And a voice was heard saying, "This way! this way! A few steps more, Sire!"—"The voice of M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan, who was standing

close to the queen-mother. "Then M. d'Herblay cannot be far off," added Philippe.

But he then saw what he little thought to see so near to him. All eyes were turned towards the door at which M. Fouquet was expected to enter; but it was not M. Fouquet who entered. A terrible cry resounded from all corners of the chamber. It is not given to men, even to those whose destiny contains the strangest elements and accidents the most wonderful, to contemplate a spectacle similar to that which presented itself in the royal chamber at that moment. The half-closed shutters admitted the entrance of only an uncertain light, passing through large velvet curtains lined with silk. In this soft shade the eyes were by degrees dilated, and every one present saw others rather with faith than with positive sight. In these circumstances, however, not one of the surrounding details could escape; and any new object which presented itself appeared as luminous as if it had been enlightened by the sun. So it was with Louis XIV., when he showed himself pale and frowning in the doorway of the secret stairs. The face of Fouquet appeared behind him, impressed with sorrow and sternness. The queen-mother, who perceived Louis XIV., and who held the hand of Philippe, uttered the cry of which we have spoken, as if she had beheld a phantom. Monsieur was bewildered, and kept turning his head in astonishment from one to the other. Madame made a step forward, thinking she saw the form of her brother-in-law reflected in a glass; and, in fact, the illusion was possible.

The two princes, both pale as death,—for we renounce the hope of being able to describe the fearful state of Philippe,—both trembling, and clinching their hands convulsively, measured each other with their looks and darted their eyes, like poniards, into each other. Mute, panting, bending forward, they appeared as if about to spring upon an enemy. The unheard-of resemblance of countenance, gesture, shape, height, even of costume,—produced by chance, for Louis XIV. had been to the Louvre and put on a violet-coloured suit,—the perfect likeness of the two princes completed the consternation of Anne of Austria. And yet she did not at once guess the truth. There are misfortunes in life that no one will accept; people would rather believe in the supernatural and the impossible. Louis had not reckoned upon these obstacles. He expected that he had only to appear and be acknowledged. A living sun, he could not endure the suspicion of parity with any one. He did not admit

that every torch should not become darkness at the instant he shone out with his conquering ray. At the aspect of Philippe, then, he was perhaps more terrified than any one round him, and his silence, his immobility, were this time a concentration and a calm which precede violent explosions of passion.

But Fouquet! who could paint his emotion and stupor in presence of this living portrait of his master! Fouquet thought Aramis was right,—that this new-comer was a king as pure in his race as the other, and that for having repudiated all participation in this *coup d'état*, so skilfully got up by the general of the Jesuits, he must be a mad enthusiast unworthy of ever again dipping his hands in a political work. And then it was the blood of Louis XIII. which Fouquet was sacrificing to the blood of Louis XIII.; it was to a selfish ambition he was sacrificing a noble ambition; it was to the right of keeping he sacrificed the right of having! The whole extent of his fault was revealed to him by the simple sight of the pretender. All that passed in the mind of Fouquet was lost upon the persons present. He had five minutes to concentrate his meditations upon this point of the case of conscience; five minutes,—that is to say, five ages,—during which the two kings and their family scarcely found time to breathe after so terrible a shock.

D'Artagnan, leaning against the wall in front of Fouquet, with his hand to his brow, asked himself the cause of such a wonderful prodigy. He could not have said at once why he doubted, but he knew assuredly that he had reason to doubt, and that in this meeting of the two Louis XIV.'s lay all the mystery which during late days had rendered the conduct of Aramis so suspicious to the musketeer. These ideas were, however, enveloped in thick veils. The actors in this assembly seemed to swim in the vapours of a confused waking.

Suddenly Louis XIV., more impatient and more accustomed to command, ran to one of the shutters, which he opened, tearing the curtains in his eagerness. A flood of living light entered the chamber, and made Philippe draw back to the alcove. Louis seized upon this movement with eagerness, and addressing himself to the queen, "My mother," said he, "do you not acknowledge your son, since every one here has forgotten his king?" Anne of Austria started, and raised her arms towards heaven, without being able to articulate a single word. "My mother," said Philippe, with a calm voice, "do you not acknowledge your son?" And this time, in his turn, Louis drew back.

Digitized by Google

As to Anne of Austria, struck in both head and heart with remorse, she was no longer able to stand. No one aiding her, for all were petrified, she sank back in her *fauteuil*, breathing a weak, trembling sigh. Louis could not endure this spectacle and this affront. He bounded towards D'Artagnan, upon whom the vertigo was beginning to gain, and who staggered as he caught at the door for support. "*A moi, mousquetaire!*" said he. "Look us in the face and say which is the paler, he or I!" This cry roused D'Artagnan, and stirred in his heart the fibre of obedience. He shook his head, and without more hesitation, he walked straight up to Philippe, upon whose shoulder he laid his hand, saying, "Monsieur, you are my prisoner!"

Philippe did not raise his eyes towards heaven, nor stir from the spot, where he seemed nailed to the floor, his eye intently fixed upon the king, his brother. He reproached him by a sublime silence with all his misfortunes past, with all his tortures to come. Against this language of the soul Louis XIV. felt he had no power; he cast down his eyes, and led away precipitately his brother and sister, forgetting his mother, sitting motionless within three paces of the son whom she left a second time to be condemned to death. Philippe approached Anne of Austria, and said to her in a soft and nobly agitated voice, "If I were not your son, I should curse you, my mother, for having rendered me so unhappy."

D'Artagnan felt a shudder pass through the marrow of his bones. He bowed respectfully to the young prince, and said as he bent, "Excuse me, Monseigneur; I am but a soldier, and my oaths are his who has just left the chamber."—"Thank you, M. d'Artagnan; but what is become of M. d'Herblay?"—"M. d'Herblay is in safety, Monseigneur," said a voice behind them; "and no one, while I live and am free, shall cause a hair to fall from his head."

"M. Fouquet!" said the prince, smiling sadly.—"Pardon me, Monseigneur," said Fouquet, kneeling; "but he who is just gone out from hence was my guest."—"Here are," murmured Philippe, with a sigh, "brave friends and good hearts. They make me regret the world. On, M. d'Artagnan, I follow you!"

At the moment the captain of the musketeers was about to leave the room with his prisoner, Colbert appeared, and after delivering to D'Artagnan an order from the king, retired. D'Artagnan read the paper, and then crushed it in his hand with rage. "What is it?" asked the prince.—"Read, Mon-

seigneur," replied the musketeer. Philippe read the following words, hastily traced by the hand of the king:—

"M. d'Artagnan will conduct the prisoner to the Ile Ste. Marguerite. He will cover his face with an iron visor, which the prisoner cannot raise without peril of his life."

"It is just," said Philippe, with resignation; "I am ready." —"Aramis was right," said Fouquet, in a low voice to the musketeer, "this one is quite as much of a king as the other."— "More," replied D'Artagnan. "He needs only you and me."

CHAPTER CCXXXI

IN WHICH PORTHOS THINKS HE IS PURSUING A DUCHY

ARAMIS and Porthos, having profited by the time granted them by Fouquet, did honour to the French cavalry by their speed. Porthos did not clearly understand for what kind of mission he was forced to display so much velocity; but as he saw Aramis spurring on furiously, he, Porthos, spurred on in the same manner. They had soon, in this manner, placed twelve leagues between them and Vaux; they were then obliged to change horses, and organise a sort of post arrangement. It was during a relay that Porthos ventured to interrogate Aramis discreetly. "Hush!" replied the latter; "know only that our fortune depends upon our speed."

As if Porthos had still been the musketeer of 1626, without a sou or a *maille*, he pushed forward. The magic word "fortune" always means something in the human ear. It means *enough* for those who have nothing; it means *too much* for those who have enough.

"I shall be made a duke!" said Porthos, aloud. He was speaking to himself. "That is possible," replied Aramis, smiling after his own fashion, as the horse of Porthos passed him. The head of Aramis was, notwithstanding, on fire; the activity of the body had not yet succeeded in subduing that of the mind. All that there is in raging passions, in severe toothaches, or mortal threats twisted, gnawed, and groaned in the thoughts of the vanquished prelate. His countenance exhibited very visible traces of this rude combat. Free upon the highway to abandon himself to every impression of the moment, Aramis did not fail

Digitized by Google

to swear at every start of his horse, at every inequality in the road. Pale, at times inundated with boiling sweats, then again dry and icy, he beat his horses and made the blood stream from their sides. Porthos, whose dominant fault was not sensibility, groaned at this. Thus they travelled on for eight long hours, and then arrived at Orléans. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Aramis, searching his recollections, judged that nothing demonstrated pursuit to be possible. It would be without example that a troop capable of taking him and Porthos should be furnished with relays sufficient to perform forty leagues in eight hours. Thus, admitting pursuit, which was not at all manifest, the fugitives were five hours in advance of their pursuers.

Aramis thought that there might be no imprudence in taking a little rest, but that to continue would make the matter more certain. Twenty leagues more performed with the same rapidity, twenty more leagues devoured, and no one, not even D'Artagnan, could overtake the enemies of the king. Aramis felt obliged, therefore, to inflict upon Porthos the pain of mounting on horseback again. They rode on till seven o'clock in the evening, and had only one post more between them and Blois. But here a diabolical accident alarmed Aramis greatly; there were no horses at the post. The prelate asked himself by what infernal machination his enemies had succeeded in depriving him of the means of going farther. He who never recognised chance as a deity, he who found a cause for every result,—he preferred believing that the refusal of the postmaster, at such an hour, in such a country, was the consequence of an order emanating from above; an order given with a view of stopping short the king-maker in the midst of his flight. But at the moment he was about to fly into a passion, so as to procure either a horse or an explanation, he suddenly recollected that the Comte de la Fère lived in the neighbourhood.

"I am not travelling," said he; "I do not want horses for a whole stage. Find me two horses to go and pay a visit to a nobleman of my acquaintance who resides near this place." —"What nobleman?" asked the postmaster.—"M. le Comte de la Fère."

"Oh!" replied the postmaster, uncovering with respect, "a very worthy nobleman. But whatever may be my desire to make myself agreeable to him, I cannot furnish you with horses, for all mine are engaged by M. le Duc de Beaufort."—"Indeed!" said Aramis, much disappointed.—"Only," continued the post-

master, "if you will put up with a little carriage I have, I will harness an old blind horse, who has still his legs left, and who will draw you to the house of M. le Comte de la Fère."—"That is worth a louis," said Aramis.

"No, Monsieur, that is never worth more than a crown. That is what M. Grimaud, the count's intendant, always pays me when he makes use of that carriage; and I should not wish the Comte de la Fère to have to reproach me with having imposed on one of his friends."—"As you please," said Aramis, "particularly as regards disobliging the Comte de la Fère; you will have your crown, but I have a right to give you a louis for your idea."

"Oh, doubtless!" replied the postmaster, with delight; and he himself harnessed the old horse to the creaking carriage. In the meantime Porthos was curious to behold. He imagined he had discovered the secret, and he felt pleased,—because a visit to Athos in the first place promised him much satisfaction, and in the next, gave him the hopes of finding at the same time a good bed and a good supper. The master, having got the carriage ready, ordered one of his men to drive the strangers to La Fère. Porthos took his seat by the side of Aramis, whispering in his ear, "I understand."

"Ah, ah!" said Aramis, "and what do you understand, my friend?"—"We are going, on the part of the king, to make some great proposal to Athos."—"Pooh!" said Aramis.—"You need tell me nothing about it," added the worthy Porthos, endeavouring to place himself so as to avoid the jolting,—"you need tell me nothing, I shall guess."—"Well, do, my friend; guess away."

They arrived at Athos's dwelling about nine o'clock in the evening, favoured by a splendid moon. This cheerful light rejoiced Porthos beyond expression; but Aramis appeared annoyed by it in an equal degree. He could not help showing something of this to Porthos, who replied, "Ay, ay! I guess how it is!—the mission is a secret one." These were his last words in the carriage. The driver interrupted him by saying, "Gentlemen, you are arrived."

Porthos and his companion alighted before the gate of the little château, where we are about to meet again with Athos and Bragelonne, both of whom had disappeared after the discovery of the infidelity of La Vallière.

If there be one saying more true than another, it is this: great griefs contain within themselves the germ of their consolation.

The painful wound inflicted upon Raoul had drawn him nearer to his father; and God knows how sweet were the consolations that flowed from the eloquent mouth and generous heart of Athos. The wound was not healed, but Athos, by dint of conversing with his son and mingling a little of his life with that of the young man, had brought him to understand that this pang of a first infidelity is necessary to every human existence; and that no one has loved without meeting with it.

Raoul listened often, but never understood. Nothing replaces in the deeply afflicted heart the remembrance and thought of the beloved object. Raoul replied to the reasonings of his father, "Monsieur, all that you tell me is true. I believe that no one has suffered in the affections of the heart so much as you have; but you are a man too great in intelligence, and too severely tried by misfortunes, not to allow for the weakness of the soldier who suffers for the first time. I am paying a tribute which I shall not pay a second time; permit me to plunge myself so deeply in my grief that I may forget myself in it, that I may drown in it even my reason."—"Raoul! Raoul!"—"Listen, Monsieur. Never shall I accustom myself to the idea that Louise, the most chaste and the most innocent of women, has been able so basely to deceive a man so honest and so loving as I. Never can I persuade myself that I see that sweet and good mask change into a hypocritical and lascivious face. Louise lost! Louise infamous! Ah, Monseigneur, that idea is much more cruel to me than Raoul abandoned, Raoul unhappy!"

Athos then employed the heroic remedy. He defended Louise against Raoul, and justified her perfidy by her love. "A woman who would have yielded to the king because he is the king," said he, "would deserve to be styled infamous; but Louise loves Louis. Both young, they have forgotten, he his rank, she her vows. Love absolves everything, Raoul. The two young people love each other with sincerity." And when he had dealt this severe poniard-thrust, Athos, with a sigh, saw Raoul bound away under the cruel wound, and fly to the thickest recesses of the wood or the solitude of his chamber, whence, an hour after, he would return, pale and trembling, but subdued. Then coming up to Athos with a smile he would kiss his hand, like the dog who having been beaten caresses a good master to redeem his fault. Raoul listened only to his weakness, and confessed only his grief.

Thus passed away the days that followed that scene in which

Digitized by Google

Athos had so violently shaken the indomitable pride of the king. Never, when conversing with his son, did he make any allusion to that scene; never did he give him the details of that vigorous lecture, which might perhaps have consoled the young man, by showing him his rival humbled. Athos did not wish that the offended lover should forget the respect due to the king. And when Bragelonne, ardent, furious, and melancholy, spoke with contempt of royal words, of the equivocal faith which certain madmen draw from promises falling from thrones; when, passing over two centuries with the rapidity of a bird which traverses a narrow strait, to go from one world to the other, Raoul ventured to predict the time in which kings would become less than other men,—Athos said to him in his serene, persuasive voice, "You are right, Raoul. All that you say will happen: kings will lose their privileges, as stars which have completed their time lose their splendour. But when that moment shall come, Raoul, we shall be dead. And remember well what I say to you. In this world, all—men, women, and kings—must live for the present. We can live for the future only in living for God."

This was the manner in which Athos and Raoul were as usual conversing, as they walked backwards and forwards in the long alley of limes in the park, when the bell which served to announce to the count either the hour of dinner or the arrival of a visitor, was rung. Mechanically, without attaching any importance to the summons, he turned towards the house with his son; and at the end of the alley they found themselves in the presence of Aramis and Porthos.

CHAPTER CCXXXII

THE LAST ADIEUX

Raoul uttered a cry, and affectionately embraced Porthos. Aramis and Athos embraced like old men; and this embrace itself was a question for Aramis, who immediately said, "My friend, we have not long to remain with you."—"Ah!" said the count.—"Only time to tell you of my good fortune," interrupted Porthos.—"Ah!" said Raoul.

Athos looked silently at Aramis, whose sombre air had already appeared to him very little in harmony with the good

news of which Porthos spoke. "What is the good fortune that has happened to you? Let us hear it," said Raoul, with a smile. "The king has made me a duke," said the worthy Porthos, with an air of mystery, in the ear of the young man; "a duke by *brevet*."

But the *asides* of Porthos were always loud enough to be heard by everybody. His murmurs were in the diapason of ordinary roaring. Athos heard him, and uttered an exclamation which made Aramis start. The latter took Athos by the arm, and after having asked Porthos's permission to say a word to his friend in private, "My dear Athos," he began, "you see me overwhelmed with grief."—"With grief, my dear friend?" cried the count.

"In two words. I have raised a conspiracy against the king; that conspiracy has failed, and at this moment I am doubtless pursued."—"You are pursued! a conspiracy! Eh! my friend, what do you tell me?"—"A sad truth. I am entirely ruined."

"Well, but Porthos—this title of duke—what does all that mean?"—"That is the subject of my severest pain; that is the deepest of my wounds. I have, believing in an infallible success, drawn Porthos into my conspiracy. He has thrown himself into it as you know he would do, with all his strength, without knowing what he was about; and now he is as much compromised as myself,—as completely ruined as I am."—"Good God!" and Athos turned towards Porthos, who was smiling complacently.

"I must make you acquainted with the whole. Listen to me," continued Aramis; and he related the history as we know it. Athos, during the recital, several times felt the sweat break from his forehead. "It was a great idea," said he; "but a great error."—"For which I am punished, Athos."—"Therefore I will not tell you my entire thought."—"Tell it, nevertheless."—"It is a crime."—"Capital, I know it is,—high treason."

"Porthos! poor Porthos!"—"What should I have done? Success, as I have told you, was certain."—"M. Fouquet is an honourable man."—"And I am a fool for having so ill judged him," said Aramis. "Oh, the wisdom of man! Oh, vast millstone which grinds a world, and which is one day stopped by a grain of sand which has fallen, no one knows how, in its wheels!"—"Say by a diamond, Aramis. But the thing is done. How do you think of acting?"

"I am taking away Porthos. The king will never believe that that worthy man has acted innocently. He never can

believe that Porthos has thought he was serving the king, while acting as he has done. His head would pay for my fault. It shall not be so."—"You are taking him away, whither?"—"To Belle-Isle, at first. That is an impregnable place of refuge. Then I have the sea, and a vessel to pass over into England, where I have many relatives."—"You? in England?"—"Yes; or else in Spain, where I have still more."

"But our excellent Porthos! you ruin him, for the king will confiscate all his property."—"All is provided for. I know how, when once in Spain, to reconcile myself with Louis XIV., and restore Porthos to favour."—"You have credit, seemingly, Aramis?" said Athos, with a discreet air.—"Much; and at the service of my friends." These words were accompanied by a warm pressure of the hand. "Thank you," replied the count.

"And while we are on that head," said Aramis, "you also are a malcontent; you also, Raoul, have griefs to lay to the king. Follow our example; pass over into Belle-Isle. Then we shall see. I guarantee upon my honour that in a month there will be war between France and Spain on the subject of this son of Louis XIII., who is an infante likewise, and whom France detains inhumanly. Now, as Louis XIV. would have no inclination for a war on that subject, I will answer for a transaction, the result of which must bring greatness to Porthos and to me, and a duchy in France to you, who are already a grandee of Spain. Will you join us?"—"No; for my part I prefer having something to reproach the king with. It is a pride natural to my race to pretend to a superiority over royal races. Doing what you propose, I should become a dependent of the king; I should certainly be the gainer on that ground, but I should be a loser in my conscience. No, thank you!"

"Then, give me two things, Athos,—your absolution."—"Oh, I give it you if you have really wished to avenge the weak and the oppressed against the oppressor."—"That is sufficient for me," said Aramis, with a blush which was lost in the obscurity of the night. "And now give me your best two horses to gain the second post, as I have been refused any under the pretext of a journey which the Duc de Beaufort is making in this country."

"You shall have two of my best horses, Aramis; and I again recommend Porthos strongly to you."—"Oh, have no fear on that head. One word more: do you think I am planning wisely for him?"—"The evil being committed, yes; for the king would not pardon him, and you have, whatever may be

said, always a supporter in M. Fouquet who will not abandon you, being himself compromised, notwithstanding his heroic action."

"You are right. And that is why, instead of gaining the sea at once, which would proclaim my fear and guilt,—that is why I remain upon French ground. But Belle-Isle will be for me whatever ground I wish it to be, English, Spanish, or Roman; all depends on the standard I shall think proper to unfurl."—"How so?"—"It was I who fortified Belle-Isle; and while I defend it, nobody can take Belle-Isle from me. And then, as you have said just now, M. Fouquet is there. Belle-Isle will not be attacked without the signature of M. Fouquet."—"That is true. Nevertheless, be prudent. The king is both cunning and strong."

Aramis smiled. "I again recommend Porthos to you," repeated the count, with a sort of cold persistence.—"Whatever becomes of me, Count," replied Aramis, in the same tone, "our brother Porthos will fare as I do." Athos bowed while pressing the hand of Aramis, and turned to embrace Porthos with much emotion. "I was born lucky, was I not?" murmured the latter, transported with happiness, as he folded his cloak round him.

"Come, my dear friend," said Aramis. Raoul had gone out to give orders for the saddling of the horses. The group was already divided. Athos saw his two friends on the point of departure, and something like a mist passed before his eyes, and weighed upon his heart. "It is strange," thought he, "whence comes the inclination I feel to embrace Porthos once more." At that moment Porthos turned round, and came towards his old friend with open arms. This last endearment was tender as in youth, as in times when the heart was warm and life happy; and then Porthos mounted his horse. Aramis came back once more to throw his arms round the neck of Athos. The latter watched them along the high road, elongated by the shade, in their white cloaks. Like two phantoms, they seemed to be enlarged on departing from the earth; and it was not in the mist, but in the declivity of the ground that they disappeared. At the end of the perspective, both seemed to have given a spring with their feet, which made them vanish as if evaporated into the clouds.

Then Athos, with an oppressed heart, returned towards the house, saying to Bragelonne, "Raoul, I don't know what it is that has just told me that I have seen these two men for the

Digitized by Google

last time."—"It does not astonish me, Monsieur, that you should have such a thought," replied the young man, "for I have at this moment the same, and I also think that I shall never see Messieurs du Vallon and d'Herblay again."

"Oh, you!" replied the count, "you speak like a man rendered sad by another cause,—you see everything in black; but you are young, and if you chance never to see those old friends again, it will be because they no longer exist in the world in which you have many years to pass. As for me—" Raoul shook his head sadly, and leaned upon the shoulder of the count, neither of them finding another word in their hearts, which were ready to overflow.

All at once a noise of horses and voices from the extremity of the road to Blois attracted their attention that way. Mounted torch-bearers shook their torches merrily among the trees of their route, and turned round from time to time to avoid distancing the horsemen who followed them. These flames, this noise, this dust of a dozen richly caparisoned horses, formed a strange contrast in the middle of the night with the melancholy, funereal disappearance of the two shadows of Aramis and Porthos. Athos went towards the house; but he had hardly reached the parterre when the entrance gate appeared in a blaze; all the flambeaux stopped and appeared to inflame the road. A cry was heard of "M. le Duc de Beaufort!" and Athos sprang towards the door of his house. But the duke had already alighted from his horse, and was looking around him.

"I am here, Monseigneur," said Athos.—"Ah, good-evening, dear Count," said the prince, with that frank cordiality which won him so many hearts. "Is it too late for a friend?"—"Ah, my dear Prince, come in!" said the count. And M. de Beaufort leaning on the arm of Athos, they entered the house, followed by Raoul, who walked respectfully and modestly among the officers of the prince, with several of whom he was acquainted.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXXIII

M. DE BEAUFORT

THE prince turned round at the moment when Raoul, in order to leave him alone with Athos, was shutting the door, and preparing to go with the other officers into an adjoining apartment. "Is that the young man I have heard Monsieur the Prince speak so highly of?" asked M. de Beaufort.—"It is, Monseigneur."—"He is quite the soldier; let him stay, Count, we cannot spare him."

"Remain, Raoul, since Monseigneur permits it," said Athos.—"*Ma foi!* he is tall and handsome!" continued the duke. "Will you give him to me, Monseigneur, if I ask him of you?"—"How am I to understand you, Monseigneur?" said Athos.

"Why, I call upon you to bid you farewell."—"Farewell?"—"Yes, in good truth. Have you no idea of what I am about to be?"—"Why, what you have always been, Monseigneur,—a valiant prince and an excellent gentleman."—"I am going to be an African prince,—a Bedouin gentleman. The king is sending me to make conquests among the Arabs."—"What do you tell me, Monseigneur?"—"Strange, is it not? I, the Parisian *par essence*,—I, who have reigned in the faubourgs, and have been called King of the Halles—I am going to pass from the Place Maubert to the minarets of Djidgelli; I become from a Frondeur an adventurer!"

"Oh, Monseigneur, if you did not yourself tell me that—"—"It would not be credible, would it? Believe me, nevertheless, and let us bid each other farewell. This is what comes of getting into favour again."—"Into favour?"—"Yes. You smile? Ah, my dear Count, do you know why I have accepted this enterprise; can you guess?"

"Because your Highness loves glory above everything."—"Oh, no; there is no glory in firing muskets at savages. I see no glory in that, for my part, and it is more probable that I shall there meet with something else. But I have wished, and still wish earnestly, my dear Count, that my life should have this last facet, after all the whimsical exhibitions I have made in fifty years. For, in short, you must admit that it is sufficiently strange to be born the grandson of a king, to have made war against kings, to have been reckoned among the powers

of the age, to have maintained my rank, to feel Henry IV. within me, to be great Admiral of France, and then to go and get killed at Djidgelli among all those Turks, Saracens, and Moors!"

"Monseigneur, you dwell strangely upon that subject," said Athos, in an agitated voice. "How can you suppose that so brilliant a destiny will be extinguished in that remote and miserable scene?"—"And can you believe, just and simple man as you are, that if I go into Africa for this ridiculous motive, I will not endeavour to come out of it without ridicule? Will I not give the world cause to speak of me? and to be spoken of nowadays, when there are Monsieur the Prince, M. de Turenne, and many others, my contemporaries, I, Admiral of France, grandson of Henry IV., King of Paris,—have I anything left but to get myself killed? *Cordieu!* I will be talked of, I tell you; I will be killed, whether or not,—if not there, somewhere else."

"Why, Monseigneur, this is only exaggeration; and hitherto you have demonstrated nothing of that kind but in bravery."—"*Peste!* my dear friend, there is bravery in facing scurvy, dysentery, locusts, and poisoned arrows, as my ancestor Saint Louis did. Do you know those fellows still use poisoned arrows? And then, you know me of old, I fancy; and you know that when I once make up my mind to a thing, I do it in earnest."

"Yes,—you made up your mind to escape from Vincennes."—"Ay, but you aided me in that, my master; and, *à propos*, I turn this way and turn that without seeing my old friend M. Vaugrimaud. How is he?"—"M. Vaugrimaud is still your Highness's most respectful servant," said Athos, smiling.

"I have a hundred pistoles here for him, which I bring as a legacy. My will is made, Count."—"Ah, Monseigneur! Monseigneur!"—"And you may understand that if Grimaud's name were to appear in my will—" The duke began to laugh; then, addressing Raoul, who from the beginning of this conversation had sunk into a profound reverie, "Young man," said he, "I know there is to be found here a certain De Vouvray wine, and I believe—" Raoul left the room precipitately to order the wine. In the meantime, M. de Beaufort took the hand of Athos.

"What do you mean to do with him?" asked he.—"Nothing, at present, Monseigneur."—"Ah, yes, I know,—since the passion of the king for La Vallière."—"Yes, Monseigneur,"—

"That is all true then, is it? I think I know her, that little Vallière. She is not particularly handsome, if I remember rightly."—"No, Monseigneur," said Athos.

"Do you know of whom she reminds me?"—"Does she remind your Highness of any one?"—"She reminds me of a very agreeable girl whose mother lived in the Halles."—"Ah, ah!" said Athos, smiling.

"Oh, the good old times!" added M. de Beaufort. "Yes, Vallière reminds me of that girl."—"Who had a son, had she not?"—"I believe she had," replied the duke, with careless *naïveté* and a complaisant forgetfulness of which no words could translate the tone and the vocal expression. "Now, here is poor Raoul, who is your son, I believe."—"Yes, he is my son, Monseigneur."—"And the poor lad has been cut out by the king, and he frets."—"Better than that, Monseigneur, he abstains."

"You are going to let the boy rust in idleness; you are wrong. Come, give him to me!"—"My wish is to keep him at home, Monseigneur. I have no longer anything in the world but him, and as long as he is willing to remain—"—"Well, well," replied the duke. "I could, nevertheless, have soon put matters to rights again. I assure you, I think he has in him the stuff of which marshals of France are made; I have seen more than one produced from such material."—"That is very possible, Monseigneur; but it is the king who makes marshals of France, and Raoul will never accept anything of the king."

Raoul interrupted this conversation by his return. He preceded Grimaud, whose still steady hands carried the salver with one glass and a bottle of the duke's favourite wine. On seeing his old *protégé*, the duke uttered an exclamation of pleasure. "Grimaud! Good-evening, Grimaud!" said he; "how goes it?"

The servant bowed profoundly, as much gratified as his noble interlocutor. "Two old friends!" said the duke, shaking honest Grimaud's shoulder after a vigorous fashion, which was followed by another still more profound and delighted bow from Grimaud.

"But what is this, Count,—only one glass?"—"I should not think of drinking with your Highness, unless your Highness invites me," replied Athos, with noble humility.—"*Cordieu!* you were right to bring only one glass; we will both drink out of it, like two brothers-in-arms. Begin, Count."—"Do me the honour," said Athos, gently putting back the glass.

Google

"You are a charming friend," replied the Duc de Beaufort, who drank and passed the goblet to his companion. "But that is not all," continued he; "I am still thirsty, and I wish to do honour to this handsome young man who stands here. I carry good luck with me, Viscount," said he to Raoul; "wish for something while drinking out of my glass, and the plague stifle me if what you wish does not come to pass!" He held the goblet to Raoul, who hastily moistened his lips, and replied with the same promptitude, "I have wished for something, Monseigneur." His eyes sparkled with a gloomy fire, and the blood mounted to his cheeks; he terrified Athos, if only with his smile.

"And what have you wished for?" replied the duke, sinking back into his arm-chair, while with one hand he returned the bottle to Grimaud and with the other gave him a purse.—"Will you promise me, Monseigneur, to grant me what I wish for?" —"*Pardieu!* That is agreed upon."—"I wished, Monsieur the Duke, to go with you to Djidgelli."

Athos became pale, and was unable to conceal his agitation. The duke looked at his friend, as if desirous to assist him to parry this unexpected blow. "That is difficult, my dear Viscount, very difficult," added he, in a lower tone of voice.

"Pardon me, Monseigneur, I have been indiscreet," replied Raoul, in a firm voice; "but as you yourself invited me to wish—"—"To wish to leave me?" said Athos.—"Oh, Monsieur—can you imagine—"—"Well, *mordieu!*" cried the duke, "the young viscount is right! What can he do here? He will rot with grief." Raoul blushed; and the prince, excited, continued, "War is a distraction. We gain everything by it; we can lose only one thing by it,—life; then so much the worse!" —"That is to say, memory," said Raoul, eagerly; "and that is to say, so much the better!"

He repented of having spoken so warmly when he saw Athos rise and open the window—which was doubtless to conceal his emotion. Raoul sprang towards the count, but the latter had already overcome his emotion, and turned to the lights with a serene and impassive countenance.

"Well, come," said the duke, "let us see! Shall he go, or shall he not? If he goes, Count, he shall be my aide-de-camp, my son."—"Monseigneur!" cried Raoul, bending his knee.—"Monseigneur!" cried Athos, taking the hand of the duke; "Raoul shall do just as he likes."—"Oh, no, Monsieur, just as you like," interrupted the young man.

Digitized by Google

"*Par la corbleu!*" said the prince, in his turn, "it is neither the count nor the viscount that shall have his way,—it is I. I will take him away. The navy offers a superb future, my friend." Raoul smiled again so sadly that this time Athos was wounded to the heart, and replied to him by a severe look. Raoul comprehended it all; he recovered his calmness, and was so guarded that not another word escaped him. The duke at length rose, on observing the advanced hour, and said with much animation, "I am in great haste, but if I am told I have lost time in talking with a friend, I will reply that I have gained a good recruit."

"Pardon me, Monsieur the Duke," interrupted Raoul, "do not tell the king so, for it is not the king I will serve."—"Eh, my friend, whom then will you serve? The times are past when you might have said, 'I belong to M. de Beaufort.' No, nowadays, we all belong to the king, great or small. Therefore, if you serve on board my vessels, there can be nothing equivocal in it, my dear Viscount; it will be the king you will serve."

Athos waited with a kind of impatient joy for the reply about to be made to this embarrassing question by Raoul, the intractable enemy of the king, his rival. The father hoped that the obstacle would overcome the desire. He was thankful to M. de Beaufort, whose lightness or generous reflection had thrown an impediment in the way of the departure of a son now his only joy.

Raoul, still firm and tranquil, replied, "Monsieur the Duke, the objection you make I have already considered in my mind. I will serve on board your vessels, because you do me the honour to take me with you; but I shall there serve a more powerful master than the king,—I shall serve God!"—"God! how so?" said the duke and Athos together.—"My intention is to make profession, and become a Knight of Malta," added Bragelonne, letting fall one by one words more icy than the drops which fall from the bare trees after the tempests of winter.

Under this last blow Athos staggered, and the prince himself was moved. Grimaud uttered a heavy groan, and let fall the bottle, which was broken without anybody paying attention to it. M. de Beaufort looked the young man in the face, and read plainly, though his eyes were cast down, the fire of resolution before which everything must give way. As for Athos, he was too well acquainted with that tender but inflexible soul; he could not hope to make it deviate from the fatal road it had just chosen. He could only press the hand of the duke held

out to him. "Count, I shall set off in two days for Toulon," said M. de Beaufort. "Will you meet me at Paris, in order that I may know your determination?"—"I will have the honour of thanking you there, my Prince, for all your kindnesses," replied the count.—"And be sure to bring the viscount with you, whether he follows me or does not follow me," added the duke; "he has my word, and I only ask yours."

Having thus thrown a little balm upon the wound of that paternal heart, he pulled the ear of Grimaud, whose eyes sparkled more than usual, and regained his escort in the parterre. The horses, rested and refreshed, set off with spirit through this beautiful night, and soon placed a considerable distance between their master and the château.

Athos and Bragelonne were again face to face. Eleven o'clock was striking. The father and son preserved a profound silence towards each other, where an intelligent observer would have expected cries and tears. But these two men were of such a nature that all emotion buried itself for ever when they had resolved to confine it to their own hearts. They passed, then, silently and almost breathlessly the hour which preceded midnight. The clock, by striking, alone pointed out to them how many minutes the painful journey had lasted, which their souls had made in the immensity of the remembrances of the past and of the fears of the future. Athos rose first, saying, "It is late; till to-morrow."

Raoul rose in his turn, and embraced his father. The latter held him clasped to his breast, and said in a tremulous voice, "In two days you will have left me, then,—left me for ever, Raoul?"—"Monsieur," replied the young man, "I had formed a determination,—that of piercing my heart with my sword; but you would have thought that cowardly. I have renounced that determination, and therefore we must part."

"You leave me by going, Raoul."—"Listen to me again, Monsieur, I implore you. If I do not go, I shall die here of grief and love. I know how long a time I have to live thus Send me away quickly, Monsieur, or you will see me b[illegible] is die before your eyes,—in your house; this is stronger [illegible] inter- will, stronger than my endurance; you may plainly blushing. within one month I have lived thirty years, and th[illegible]e pale than the end of my life."

"Then," said Athos, coldly, "you go [illegible] his way across the getting killed in Africa? Oh, tell me! I comprehended that grew deadly pale, and remained silent f[illegible]ne flight of Raoul there

were to his father two hours of agony. Then, all at once, "Monsieur," said he, "I have promised to devote myself to God. In exchange for this sacrifice which I make of my youth and my liberty, I will only ask of Him one thing, and that is to preserve me for you, because you are the only tie which attaches me to this world. God alone can give me the strength not to forget that I owe you everything, and that nothing ought to be with me before you."

Athos embraced his son tenderly, and said, "You have just replied to me on the word of honour of an honest man; in two days we shall be with M. de Beaufort at Paris, and you will then do what will be proper for you to do. You are free, Raoul; adieu." And he slowly gained his bedroom. Raoul went down into the garden, and passed the night in the alley of limes.

CHAPTER CCXXXIV

PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE

Athos lost no more time in combating this immutable resolution. He gave all his attention to preparing, during the two days the duke had granted him, the proper appointments for Raoul. This labour chiefly concerned Grimaud, who immediately applied himself to it with the good-will and intelligence we know he possessed. Athos gave this worthy servant orders to take the route to Paris when the equipments should be ready; and to avoid all risk of keeping the duke waiting, or of injury to Raoul if the duke should perceive his absence, he himself, the day after the visit of M. de Beaufort, set off for Paris with his son.

In the heart of the poor young man it aroused emotions easily to be understood, thus to return to Paris among all the people who had known and loved him. Every face recalled to him was had endured so much, a suffering; to him who had loved bottle,' some circumstance of his love. Raoul, on approaching to it. M as if he were dying. Once in Paris, he really existed read plainly,When he reached De Guiche's residence, he was before which De Guiche was with Monsieur. Raoul took the too well acquainted urg, and when arrived, without suspecting could not hope to m the place where La Vallière had lived, he just chosen. He coun breathed so many perfumes, he heard

so much joyous laughter and saw so many dancing shadows, that if it had not been for a charitable woman, who perceived him dejected and pale in a doorway, he would have remained there a few minutes, and then would have gone away never to return. But, as we have said, in the first antechambers he had stopped, solely to avoid mingling with all those happy existences which he felt were moving around him in the adjacent salons. And when one of Monsieur's servants, recognising him, had asked him if he wished to see Monsieur or Madame, Raoul had scarcely answered him, but had sunk down upon a bench near the velvet *portière*, looking at a clock, which had stopped an hour before. The servant had passed on, and another, better acquainted with him, had come up and asked Raoul whether he should inform M. de Guiche of his being there. This name even did not rouse the recollections of poor Raoul. The persistent servant went on to relate that De Guiche had just invented a new game of lottery, and was teaching it to the ladies. Raoul, opening his large eyes like the absent-minded man in Theophrastus, had made no answer; but his sadness had increased by it two shades.

With his head hanging down, his limbs relaxed, his mouth half open for the escape of his sighs, Raoul remained, thus forgotten, in the antechamber, when all at once a lady's robe passed, rubbing against the doors of a lateral salon which opened upon the gallery. A lady, young, pretty, and gay, scolding an officer of the household, entered by that way, and expressed herself with much vivacity. The officer replied in calm but firm sentences; it was rather a little love-pet than a quarrel of courtiers, and was terminated by a kiss on the fingers of the lady. Suddenly, on perceiving Raoul, the lady became silent, and pushing away the officer, "Make your escape, Malicorne," said she; "I did not think there was any one here. I shall curse you if they have either heard or seen us!"

Malicorne hastened away. The young lady advanced behind Raoul, and bending her joyous face over him, "Monsieur is a gallant man," said she, "and no doubt—" She here interrupted herself by uttering a cry,—"Raoul!" said she, blushing. —"Mademoiselle de Montalais!" said Raoul, more pale than death.

He rose unsteadily and tried to make his way across the slippery mosaic of the floor; but she had comprehended that savage and cruel grief. She felt that in the flight of Raoul there

was an accusation, or at least a suspicion against herself. A woman, ever vigilant, she did not think she ought to let the opportunity slip of making a justification; but Raoul, though stopped by her in the middle of the gallery, did not seem disposed to surrender without a combat. He took it up in a tone so cold and embarrassed that if they had been thus surprised, the whole court would have had no doubt about the proceedings of Mademoiselle de Montalais. "Ah, Monsieur," said she, with disdain, "what you are doing is very unworthy of a gentleman. My heart inclines me to speak to you; you compromise me by a reception almost uncivil. You are wrong, Monsieur; and you confound your friends with your enemies. Farewell!"

Raoul had sworn never to speak of Louise, never even to look at those who might have seen Louise; he was going into another world that he might never meet with anything Louise had seen, or anything she had touched. But after the first shock to his pride, after having had a glimpse of Montalais, the companion of Louise,—Montalais, who reminded him of the turret of Blois and the joys of youth,—all his reason left him. "Pardon me, Mademoiselle; it enters not, it cannot enter into my thoughts to be uncivil."

"Do you wish to speak to me?" said she, with the smile of former days. "Well! come somewhere else; for here we may be surprised."—"Where?" said he. She looked at the clock doubtingly, then, having reflected, "In my apartment," said she; "we shall have an hour to ourselves." And taking her course, lighter than a fairy, she ran up to her chamber, followed by Raoul. Shutting the door, and placing in the hands of her maid the mantle she had held upon her arm, "You were seeking M. de Guiche, were you not?" said she to Raoul.—"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"I will go and ask him to come up here presently, after I have spoken to you."—"Do so, Mademoiselle."—"Are you angry with me?" Raoul looked at her for a moment, then, casting down his eyes, "Yes," said he.

"You think I was concerned in the plot which brought about your rupture, do you not?"—"Rupture!" said he, with bitterness. "Oh, Mademoiselle, there can be no rupture where there has been no love."—"An error," replied Montalais; "Louise did love you." Raoul started. "Not with love, I know; but she liked you, and you ought to have married her before you set out for London."

Digitized by Google

Raoul broke into a sinister laugh which made Montalais shudder. "You tell me that very much at your ease, Mademoiselle. Do people marry whom they like? You forget that the king then kept as his mistress her of whom we are speaking."

"Listen," said the young woman, pressing the cold hands of Raoul in her own, "you were wrong in every way; a man of your age ought never to leave a woman of hers alone."—"There is no longer any faith in the world, then."—"No, Viscount," said Montalais, quietly. "Nevertheless, let me tell you that if instead of loving Louise coldly and philosophically, you had endeavoured to awaken her to love—"

"Enough, I pray you, Mademoiselle," said Raoul. "I feel that you are all, of both sexes, of a different age from me. You can laugh, and you can banter agreeably. I, Mademoiselle, I loved Mademoiselle de—" Raoul could not pronounce her name. "I loved her; well! I put faith in her,—now I am quits by loving her no longer."—"Oh, Viscount!" said Montalais, pointing to his reflection in a mirror.—"I know what you mean, Mademoiselle; I am much altered, am I not? Well, do you know why? Because my face is the mirror of my heart; the inside has changed as you see the outside has."

"You are consoled, then?" said Montalais, sharply.—"No, I shall never be consoled."—"I don't understand you, M. de Bragelonne."—"I care but little for that. I do not too well understand myself."—"You have not even tried to speak to Louise?"—"I!" exclaimed the young man, with eyes flashing fire; "I! why do you not advise me to marry her? Perhaps the king would consent now;" and he rose from his chair, full of anger.

"I see," said Montalais, "that you are not cured, and that Louise has one enemy the more."—"One enemy the more!"—"Yes; favourites are but little beloved at the court of France."—"Oh! while she has her lover to protect her, is not that enough? She has chosen him of such a quality that her enemies cannot prevail against her." But stopping all at once, "And then she has you for a friend, Mademoiselle," added he, with a shade of irony which did not glide off the cuirass.

"I? Oh, no! I am no longer one of those whom Mademoiselle de la Vallière deigns to look upon; but—" This "but," so big with menaces and storms; this "but," which made the heart of Raoul beat, such griefs did it presage for her whom lately he loved so dearly,—this terrible "but," so significant in a woman like Montalais, was interrupted by a moderately loud

noise, proceeding from the alcove behind the wainscoting. Montalais turned to listen, and Raoul was already rising, when a lady entered the room quietly by the secret door, which she closed after her.

"Madame!" exclaimed Raoul, on recognising the sister-in-law of the king.—"Stupid wretch!" murmured Montalais, throwing herself, but too late, before the princess, "I have been mistaken in the hour!" She had, however, time to warn the princess, who was walking towards Raoul.—"M. de Bragelonne, Madame;" and at these words the princess drew back, uttering a cry in her turn.

"Your royal Highness," said Montalais, with volubility, "is kind enough to think of this lottery, and—" The princess began to lose countenance. Raoul hastened his departure without yet divining all; but he felt that he was in the way. Madame was seeking to recover herself, when a closet opened in front of the alcove, and M. de Guiche issued therefrom, all radiant. The most pale of the four, we must admit, was still Raoul. The princess, however, was near fainting, and was obliged to lean upon the foot of the bed for support. No one ventured to support her. This scene occupied several minutes of terrible silence. But Raoul broke it. He went up to the count, whose inexpressible emotion made his knees tremble, and taking his hand, "Dear Count," said he, "tell Madame I am too unhappy not to merit my pardon; tell her also that I have loved in the course of my life, and that horror of the treachery that has been practised on me renders me inexorable for all other treachery that may be committed around me. This is why, Mademoiselle," said he, smiling, to Montalais, "I never will divulge the secret of the visits of my friend to your apartment. Obtain from Madame,—from Madame, who is so clement and so generous,—obtain her pardon for you whom she has just surprised also. You are both free; love each other, be happy!"

The princess felt for a moment the despair which cannot be described; it was repugnant to her, notwithstanding the exquisite delicacy which Raoul had exhibited, to feel herself at the mercy of an indiscretion. It was equally repugnant to her to accept the evasion offered by this delicate deception. Agitated, nervous, she struggled against the double stings of the two troubles. Raoul comprehended her position, and came once more to her aid. Bending his knee before her, "Madame," said he, in a low voice, "in two days I shall be far from Paris;

in a fortnight I shall be far from France, where I shall never be seen again."

"Are you going away, then?" said she, with delight.—"With M. de Beaufort."—"Into Africa!" cried De Guiche, in his turn. "You, Raoul? Oh, my friend,—into Africa, where everybody dies!" And forgetting everything, forgetting that this very forgetfulness compromised the princess more eloquently than his presence, "Ingrate!" said he, "and you have not even consulted me!" And he embraced him; during which time Montalais had led away Madame, and disappeared herself.

Raoul passed his hand over his brow, and said with a smile, "I have been dreaming!" Then warmly to De Guiche, who by degrees absorbed him, "My friend," said he, "I conceal nothing from you, who are the elected of my heart. I am going to seek death in yonder country; your secret will not remain in my breast more than a year."—"Oh, Raoul! a man!"—"Do you know what is my thought, De Guiche? This is it: I shall live more, being buried beneath the earth, than I have lived for this month past. We are Christians, my friend, and if such suffering were to continue, I would not be answerable for the safety of my soul."

De Guiche was anxious to raise objections. "Not one word more on my account," said Raoul, "but advice to you, dear friend; what I am going to say to you is of much greater importance."—"What is that?"—"Without doubt, you risk much more than I do, because you are loved."—"Oh!"

"It is a joy so sweet to me to be able to speak to you thus! Well, then, De Guiche, beware of Montalais."—"What! of that kind friend?"—"She was the friend of—her you know of. She ruined her by pride."—"You are mistaken."—"And now, when she has ruined her, she would take from her the only thing that renders that woman excusable in my eyes."—"What is that?"—"Her love."

"What do you mean by that?"—"I mean that there is a plot formed against her who is the mistress of the king,—a plot formed in the very house of Madame."—"Can you think so?"—"I am certain of it."—"By Montalais?"—"Take her as the least dangerous of the enemies I dread for—the other."

"Explain yourself clearly, my friend; and if I can understand you—"—"In two words,—Madame has been jealous of the king."—"I know she has—"—"Oh, fear nothing! you are beloved,—you are beloved, Guiche; do you feel the value of these three words? They signify that you can raise your head, that you

can sleep tranquilly, that you can thank God every minute of your life. You are beloved; that signifies that you may hear everything,—even the counsel of a friend who wishes to preserve your happiness. You are beloved, Guiche, you are beloved! You do not endure those atrocious nights, those nights without end, which, with arid eye and consumed heart, others pass through who are destined to die. You will live long if you act like the miser who, bit by bit, crumb by crumb, collects and heaps up diamonds and gold. You are beloved! allow me to tell you what you must do that you may be beloved for ever."

De Guiche contemplated for some time this unfortunate young man, half mad with despair, till there passed through his heart something like remorse at his own happiness. Raoul suppressed his feverish excitement to assume the voice and countenance of an impassive man. "They will make her whose name I should wish still to be able to pronounce,—they will make her suffer. Swear to me not only that you will not second them in anything, but that you will defend her, when possible, as I would have done myself."—"I swear I will!" replied De Guiche.—"And," continued Raoul, "some day when you shall have rendered her a great service, some day when she shall thank you, promise me to say these words to her: 'I have done you this kindness, Madame, by the warm desire of M. de Bragelonne, whom you so deeply injured.'"—"I swear I will!" murmured De Guiche.

"That is all; adieu! I set out to-morrow or the day after for Toulon; if you have a few hours to spare, give them to me."—"All! all!" cried the young man.—"Thank you."—"And what are you going to do now?"—"I am going to meet Monsieur the Count at the house of Planchet, where we shall hope to find M. d'Artagnan."

"M. d'Artagnan?"—"Yes; I wish to embrace him before my departure. He is a brave man, who loves me. Farewell, my friend. You are expected, no doubt; you will find me, when you wish, at the lodgings of the count. Farewell!" The two young men embraced. They who might have seen them both thus would not have hesitated to say, pointing to Raoul, "That is the happy man!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXXV

PLANCHET'S INVENTORY

ATHOS, during the visit made to the Luxembourg by Raoul, had gone to Planchet's residence to inquire after D'Artagnan. On arriving at the Rue des Lombards he found the shop of the grocer in great confusion; but it was not the confusion attending a lucky sale, or that of an arrival of goods. Planchet was not throned, as usual, upon sacks and barrels. No; a young man with a pen behind his ear, and another with an account-book in his hand, were setting down a number of figures, while a third counted and weighed. An inventory was being taken. Athos, who had no knowledge of commercial matters, felt himself a little embarrassed by the material obstacles and the majesty of those who were thus employed. He saw several customers sent away, and asked himself whether he, who came to buy nothing, would not be more properly deemed importunate. He therefore asked very politely if he could see M. Planchet. The reply, pretty carelessly given, was that M. Planchet was packing his trunks. These words surprised Athos. "How! his trunks?" said he; "is M. Planchet going away?"—"Yes, Monsieur, directly."—"Then, if you please, inform him that M. le Comte de la Fère desires to speak to him for a moment."

At the mention of the count's name, one of the young men, no doubt accustomed to hear it pronounced with respect, immediately went to inform Planchet. It was at this moment that Raoul, after his painful scene with Montalais and De Guiche, arrived at the grocer's house. Planchet, as soon as he received the count's message, left his work and hastened to meet him. "Ah, Monsieur the Count," exclaimed he, "how glad I am to see you! What good star brings you here?"

"My dear Planchet," said Athos, pressing the hand of his son, whose sad look he silently observed, "we are come to learn of you— But in what confusion do I find you! You are as white as a miller; where have you been rummaging?"—"Ah, *diable!* take care, Monsieur; don't come near me till I have well shaken myself."—"What for? Flour or dust only whitens."—"No, no; what you see on my arms is arsenic."

"Arsenic?"—"Yes; I am making my provision for the rats."

Digitized by Google

—"Ah! I suppose in an establishment like this the rats play a conspicuous part."—"It is not with this establishment I concern myself, Monsieur the Count. The rats have robbed me of more here than they will ever rob me of again."—"What do you mean?"—"Why, you may have observed, Monsieur, they are taking my inventory."

"Are you leaving trade, then?"—"Eh, *mon Dieu!* yes. I have disposed of my business to one of my young men."—"Bah! you are rich, then?"—"Monsieur, I have taken a dislike to the city. I don't know whether it is because I am growing old, and, as M. d'Artagnan one day said, when we grow old we more often think of the things of our youth; but for some time past I have felt myself attracted towards the country and gardening. I was a countryman formerly;" and Planchet marked this confession with a somewhat pretentious laugh for a man making profession of humility.

Athos made a gesture of approval, and then added, "You are going to buy an estate, then?"—"I have bought one, Monsieur."—"Ah! that is still better."—"A little house at Fontainebleau, with something like twenty acres of land round it."—"Very well, Planchet! Accept my compliments on your acquisition."

"But, Monsieur, we are not comfortable here; the cursed dust makes you cough. *Corbleu!* I should not wish to poison the most worthy gentleman in the kingdom."

Athos did not smile at this little pleasantry which Planchet had aimed at him to try his strength in fashionable humour. "Yes," said he; "let us have a little talk by ourselves,—in your own room, for example. You have a room, have you not?"—"Certainly, Monsieur the Count."—"Upstairs, perhaps?" And Athos, seeing Planchet a little embarrassed, wished to relieve him by going first. "It is—but—" said Planchet, hesitating. Athos was mistaken in the cause of this hesitation, and attributing it to a fear the grocer might have of offering humble hospitality, "Never mind, never mind," said he, still going up, "the dwelling of a tradesman in this quarter is not expected to be a palace. Come on!"

Raoul nimbly preceded him, and entered first. Two cries were heard simultaneously—we may say three. One of these cries dominated over the others; it was uttered by a woman. The other proceeded from the mouth of Raoul; it was an exclamation of surprise. He had no sooner made it than he shut the door sharply. The third was from fright; Planchet

had uttered it. "I ask your pardon!" added he; "Madame is dressing."

Raoul had, no doubt, seen that what Planchet said was true, for he turned round to go downstairs again. "Madame?" said Athos. "Oh, pardon me, Planchet, I did not know that you had upstairs—"—"It is Trüchen," added Planchet, blushing a little.

"It is whoever you please, my good Planchet; pardon our indiscretion."—"No, no; go up now, gentlemen."—"We will do no such thing," said Athos.—"Oh, Madame, having notice, has had time—"—"No, Planchet; farewell!"

"Eh, gentlemen! you would not disoblige me by thus standing on the staircase, or by going away without having sat down."—"If we had known you had a lady upstairs," replied Athos, with his customary coolness, "we would have asked permission to pay our respects to her."

Planchet was so disconcerted by this little extravagance that he forced the passage, and himself opened the door to admit the count and his son. Trüchen was quite dressed,—costume of the shopkeeper's wife, rich and coquettish; German eyes attacking French eyes. She ceded the apartment after two courtesies, and went down into the shop, but not without having listened at the door, to know what Planchet's gentlemen visitors would say of her. Athos suspected that, and therefore turned the conversation. Planchet, on his part, was burning to give explanations, which Athos avoided. But as certain tenacities are stronger than all others, Athos was forced to hear Planchet recite his idyls of felicity, translated into a language more chaste than that of Longus. So Planchet related how Trüchen had charmed his ripe age, and brought good luck to his business, as Ruth did to Boaz.

"You want nothing now, then, but heirs to your property."—"If I had one, he would have three hundred thousand livres," said Planchet.—"Humph! you must have one, then," said Athos, phlegmatically; "if only to prevent your little fortune being lost."

The words "little fortune" placed Planchet in his rank, like the voice of the sergeant when Planchet was but a *piqueur* in the regiment of Piedmont, in which Rochefort had placed him. Athos perceived that the grocer would marry Trüchen, and, in spite of fate, establish a family. This appeared the more evident to him when he learned that the young man to whom Planchet was selling his business was her cousin. Having heard

all that was necessary of the happy prospects of the retiring grocer, Athos inquired, "What is M. d'Artagnan about? he is not at the Louvre."

"Ah, Monsieur the Count, M. d'Artagnan has disappeared."—"Disappeared!" said Athos, with surprise.—"Oh, Monsieur, we know what that means."—"But I do not know."—"Whenever M. d'Artagnan disappears, it is always on some mission or for some great affair."

"Has he said anything to you about it?"—"Never."—"You were acquainted with his departure for England formerly, were you not?"—"On account of the speculation," replied Planchet, heedlessly.—"The speculation?"—"I mean—" interrupted Planchet, quite confused.

"Well, well; neither your affairs nor those of our friend are in question. The interest we take in him alone has induced me to apply to you. Since the captain of the musketeers is not here, and as we cannot learn from you where we are likely to find M. d'Artagnan, we will take our leave of you. *Au revoir*, Planchet, *au revoir*. Let us go, Raoul."—"Monsieur the Count, I wish I were able to tell you—"—"Oh, not at all; I am not the man to reproach a servant with discretion."

This word "servant" struck rudely on the ears of the demi-millionaire Planchet, but natural respect and *bonhomie* prevailed over pride. "There is nothing indiscreet in telling you, Monsieur the Count, that M. d'Artagnan came here the other day—"—"Ah, ah!"—"And remained several hours consulting a geographical chart.—"You are right, then, my friend; say no more about it."

"And the chart is there as a proof," added Planchet, who went to fetch from the neighbouring wall, where it was suspended by a twist, forming a triangle with the bar of the window to which it was fastened, the plan consulted by the captain on his last visit to Planchet. This plan, which he brought to the count, was a map of France, upon which the practised eye of that gentleman discovered an itinerary, marked out with small pins; where the pin was missing, a hole denoted its having been there. Athos, by following with his eye the pins and holes, saw that D'Artagnan was to take the direction of the south, and go as far as the Mediterranean towards Toulon. It was near Cannes that the marks and the punctured places ceased. The Comte de la Fère puzzled his brains for some time to divine what the musketeer could be going to do at Cannes, and what motive could have led him to examine the banks of

the Var. The reflections of Athos suggested nothing; his accustomed perspicacity was at fault. Raoul's researches were not more successful than his father's. "Never mind," said the young man to the count, who silently, and with his finger, had made him understand D'Artagnan's route; "we must confess that there is a Providence always occupied in connecting our destiny with that of M. d'Artagnan. There he is on the coast of Cannes; and you, Monsieur, will at least conduct me as far as Toulon. Be assured that we shall meet with him more easily upon our route than upon this map."

Then taking leave of Planchet, who was scolding his shopmen, even the cousin of Trüchen, his successor, the gentlemen set out to pay a visit to M. de Beaufort. On leaving the grocer's shop, they saw a coach,—the future depository of the charms of Mademoiselle Trüchen and of Planchet's bags of crowns. "Every one journeys towards happiness by the route he chooses," said Raoul, in a melancholy tone.—"Road to Fontainebleau!" cried Planchet to his coachman.

CHAPTER CCXXXVI

THE INVENTORY OF M. DE BEAUFORT

To have talked of D'Artagnan with Planchet, to have seen Planchet quit Paris to bury himself in his country retreat, had been for Athos and his son like a last farewell to the noise of the capital,—to their life of former days. What, in fact, did these men leave behind them, one of whom had exhausted the past age in glory, and the other the present age in misfortune? Evidently, neither of them had anything to ask of his contemporaries. They had only to pay a visit to M. de Beaufort, and arrange with him the particulars of the departure. The duke was lodged magnificently in Paris. He had one of those superb establishments pertaining to great fortunes which certain old men remembered to have seen flourish in the times of wasteful liberality in Henry III.'s reign. Then, in fact, several great nobles were richer than the king. They knew it; they made use of their wealth, and never deprived themselves of the pleasure of humiliating his royal Majesty when they had an opportunity. It was this egotistical aristocracy which Richelieu had constrained to contribute, with its blood, its purse, and

its duties, to what was from his time styled the king's service. From Louis XI.—that terrible mower down of the great—to Richelieu, how many families had raised their heads! How many from Richelieu to Louis XIV. had bowed their heads never to raise them again! But M. de Beaufort was born a prince, and of a blood which is not shed upon scaffolds, unless by the decree of peoples. This prince had kept up a grand style of living. How did he maintain his horses, his people, and his table? Nobody knew,—himself less than others. Only there were then privileges for the sons of kings, to whom nobody refused to become a creditor, whether from respect, devotedness, or a persuasion that they would some day be paid.

Athos and Raoul found the mansion of the duke in as much confusion as that of Planchet. The duke, likewise, was making his inventory; that is to say, he was distributing to his friends, all of them his creditors, everything of value he had in his house. Owing nearly two millions,—an enormous amount in those days,—M. de Beaufort had calculated that he could not set out for Africa without a good round sum; and in order to find that sum, he was distributing to his old creditors plate, arms, jewels, and furniture,—which was more magnificent than selling it, and brought him back double. In fact, how could a man to whom ten thousand livres were owing, refuse to carry away a present of six thousand, enhanced in merit from having belonged to a descendant of Henry IV.? And how, after having carried away that present, could he refuse ten thousand livres more to this generous noble?

This, then, was what had happened. The duke had no longer a dwelling-house,—that had become useless to an admiral, whose place of residence is his ship; no more private arms, superfluous now that he was placed amid his cannon; no more jewels, which the sea might rob him of; but he had three or four hundred thousand crowns in his coffers. And throughout the house there was a joyous movement of people who believed they were plundering Monseigneur. The prince had, in a supreme degree, the art of making happy the creditors the most to be pitied. Every distressed man, every empty purse, found with him patience and intelligence of his position. To some he said, "I wish I had what you have, I would give it to you;" and to others, "I have but this silver ewer,—it is worth at least five hundred livres; take it." The effect of which was—so truly is courtesy a current payment—that the prince constantly found means to renew his creditors. This time he used no ceremony;

it might be called a general pillage. He gave up everything. The Oriental fable of the poor Arab, who carried away from the pillage of a palace a kettle at the bottom of which was concealed a bag of gold, and whom everybody allowed to pass without jealousy,—this fable had become a truth in the prince's mansion. Many contractors paid themselves from the several departments of the establishment. Thus, the food purveyors, who plundered the clothes-presses and the harness-rooms, attached very little value to things which tailors and saddlers set great store by. Anxious to carry home to their wives preserves given them by Monseigneur, many were seen bounding joyously along under the weight of earthen jars and bottles, gloriously stamped with the arms of the prince. M. de Beaufort finished by giving away his horses and the hay from his lofts. He made more than thirty happy with kitchen utensils, and thirty more, with the contents of his cellar. Still further, all these people went away with the conviction that M. de Beaufort only acted in this manner to prepare for a new fortune concealed beneath the Arab tents. They repeated to one another, while devastating his mansion, that he was sent to Djidgelli by the king to reconstruct his lost fortunes; that the treasures of Africa would be equally divided between the admiral and the King of France; that these treasures consisted in mines of diamonds, or other fabulous stones,—the gold and silver mines of Mount Atlas did not even obtain the honour of being named. In addition to the mines to be worked,—which could not be begun till after the campaign,—there would be the booty made by the army. M. de Beaufort would lay his hands upon all the riches pirates had robbed Christendom of since the battle of Lepanto. The number of millions from these sources defied calculation. Why, then, should he who was going in quest of such treasures set any store by the poor utensils of his past life? And, reciprocally, why should they spare the property of him who spared it so little himself?

Such was the position of affairs. Athos, with his searching glance, saw what was going on at once. He found the Admiral of France a little exalted, for he was rising from a table of fifty covers, at which the guests had drunk long and deeply to the prosperity of the expedition; at which, with the dessert, the remains of the meal had been given to the servants, and the empty dishes and plates to the curious. The prince was intoxicated with his ruin and his popularity at the same time. He had drunk his old wine to the health of his future wine.

Digitized by Google

When he saw Athos and Raoul, "There is my aide-de-camp brought to me!" he cried. "Come hither, Count; come hither, Viscount." Athos tried to find a passage through the heaps of linen and plate. "Ah, step over, step over!" said the duke, offering a full glass to Athos. The latter took it; Raoul scarcely moistened his lips.

"Here is your commission," said the prince to Raoul. "I had prepared it, reckoning upon you. You will go on before me as far as Antibes."—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"Here is the order;" and De Beaufort gave Raoul the order. "Do you know anything of the sea?"—"Yes, Monseigneur; I have travelled with Monsieur the Prince."

"That is well. All these barges and lighters must be in attendance to form an escort, and carry my provisions. The army must be prepared to embark in a fortnight at latest."—"That shall be done, Monseigneur."—"The present order gives you the right to visit and search all the isles along the coast; you will there make the enrolments and levies you may want for me."—"Yes, Monsieur the Duke."

"And as you are an active man, and will work freely, you will spend much money."—"I hope not, Monseigneur."—"But I reckon you will. My intendant has prepared orders of a thousand livres, drawn upon the cities of the south; he will give you a hundred of them. Now, dear Viscount, begone!"

Athos interrupted the prince. "Keep your money, Monseigneur; war is to be made among the Arabs with gold as well as lead."—"I wish to try the contrary," replied the duke; "and then, you are acquainted with my ideas upon the expedition,—plenty of noise, plenty of fire, and, if so it must be, I shall disappear in the smoke." Having spoken thus, M. de Beaufort began to laugh; but his mirth was not reciprocated by Athos and Raoul. He perceived this at once. "Ah," said he, with the courteous egotism of his rank and his age, "you are such people as a man should not see after dinner; you are cold, stiff, and dry, when I am all fire, all suppleness, and all wine. No, devil take me! I shall always see you fasting, Viscount; and you, Count, if you wear such a face as that, I will see no more."

He said this, pressing the hand of Athos, who replied with a smile, "Monseigneur, do not talk so grandly because you happen to have plenty of money. I predict that within a month you will be dry, stiff, and cold in presence of your strong-box, and that then, having Raoul at your elbow, fasting, you will be surprised

to see him gay, animated, and generous, because he will have some new crowns to offer you."—"God grant it may be so!" cried the delighted duke. "Count, stay with me."

"No, I shall go with Raoul; the mission with which you charge him is a troublesome and a difficult one. Alone, it would be too much for him to execute. You do not observe, Monseigneur, that you have given him a command of the first order."—"Bah!"—"And in the navy!"—"That may be true. But when people resemble him, do they not do all that is required of them?"

"Monseigneur, I believe you will find nowhere so much zeal and intelligence, so much real bravery, as in Raoul; but if he failed in your embarkation, you would only meet with what you deserve."—"Humph! you are scolding me, then?"—"Prince, to provision a fleet, to assemble a flotilla, to enrol your maritime force, would take an admiral a year. Raoul is a cavalry officer, and you allow him a fortnight!"—"I tell you he will get through."—"He may; but I will help him."—"To be sure you will,—I reckoned upon you; and still further, I believe that when we are once at Toulon you will not let him depart alone."—"Oh!" said Athos, shaking his head.

"Patience! patience!"—"Monseigneur, permit us to take our leave."—"Go, then, and may my good fortune attend you!"—"Adieu, Monseigneur; and may your good fortune attend you likewise!"

"Here is an expedition admirably begun!" said Athos to his son. "No provisions, no reserves, no store flotilla! What can be done thus?"—"Humph!" murmured Raoul; "if all are going to do as I am, provisions will not be wanted."—"Monsieur," replied Athos, sternly, "do not be unjust and senseless in your egotism, or your grief, whichever you please to call it. If you set out for this war solely with the intention of getting killed in it, you stand in need of nobody, and it was scarcely worth while to recommend you to M. de Beaufort. But when you have been introduced to the prince commandant; when you have accepted the responsibility of a post in his army,—the question is no longer about you, but about all those poor soldiers who as well as you have hearts and bodies, who will weep for their country and endure all the necessities of their human condition. Remember, Raoul, that an officer is a minister as useful as a priest, and that he ought to have more charity than a priest."

"Monsieur, I know it, and have practised it; I would have continued to do so still, but—"—"You forget also that you are

Digitized by Google

of a country which is proud of its military glory; go and die if you like, but do not die without honour and without advantage to France. Cheer up, Raoul! do not let my words grieve you; I love you, and wish to see you perfect."—"I love your reproaches, Monsieur," said the young man mildly; "they alone may cure me, because they prove to me that some one loves me still."

"And now, Raoul, let us be off, the weather is so fine, the heavens are so pure,—those heavens which we shall always find above our heads, which you will see more pure still at Djidgelli, and which will speak to you of me there, as they speak to me here of God."

The two gentlemen, after having agreed on this point, talked over the wild freaks of the duke, convinced that France would be served in a very incomplete manner, as regarded both spirit and practice, in the ensuing expedition; and having summed up his policy under the word "vanity," they set forward, in obedience to their will even more than to their destiny. The sacrifice was accomplished.

CHAPTER CCXXXVII

THE SILVER PLATE

THE journey passed off pretty well. Athos and his son traversed France at the rate of fifteen leagues per day; sometimes more, sometimes less, according to the intensity of Raoul's grief. It took them a fortnight to reach Toulon, and they lost all traces of D'Artagnan at Antibes. They were forced to believe that the captain of the musketeers was desirous of preserving an incognito on his route, for Athos derived from his inquiries an assurance that such a cavalier as he described had exchanged his horse for a well-closed carriage on quitting Avignon.

Raoul was much affected at not meeting with D'Artagnan. His affectionate heart longed to take a farewell and receive consolation from that heart of steel. Athos knew from experience that D'Artagnan became impenetrable when engaged in any serious affair, whether on his own account or in the service of the king. He even feared to offend his friend, or thwart him, by too pressing inquiries. And yet when Raoul began his labour of classing the flotilla, and got together the

chalands and lighters to send them to Toulon, one of the fishermen told the count that his boat had been laid up to refit since a trip he had made on account of a gentleman who was in great haste to embark. Athos, believing that this man was telling a falsehood in order to be left at liberty to fish, and so gain more money when all his companions were gone, insisted upon having the details.

The fisherman informed him that six days previously a man had come in the night to hire his boat, for the purpose of visiting the Island of St. Honorat. The price was agreed upon; but the gentleman had arrived with an immense carriage-case, which he insisted upon embarking in spite of all the difficulties which opposed themselves to that operation. The fisherman had wished to retract; he had even threatened, but his threats had procured him nothing but a shower of blows from the gentleman's cane, which fell upon his shoulders, sharp and long. Swearing and grumbling, he had recourse to the syndic of his brotherhood at Antibes, who administer justice among themselves and protect one another; but the gentleman had exhibited a certain paper, at the sight of which the syndic, bowing to the very ground, had enjoined obedience upon the fisherman, and abused him for having been refractory. They then departed with the freight.

"But all this does not tell us," said Athos, "how you have injured your boat."—"This is the way. I was steering towards St. Honorat as the gentleman had desired me; but he changed his mind, and pretended that I could not pass to the south of the abbey."—"And why not?"—"Because, Monsieur, there is in front of the square tower of the Benedictines, towards the southern point, the bank of the *Moines*."—"A rock?" asked Athos.—"Level with the water, and below it; a dangerous passage, but one I have cleared a thousand times. The gentleman required me to land him at Ste. Marguerite."

"Well?"—"Well, Monsieur!" cried the fisherman, with his provençal accent, "a man is a sailor, or he is not; he knows his course, or he is nothing but a fresh-water lubber. I was obstinate, and wished to try the channel. The gentleman took me by the collar, and told me quietly he would strangle me. My mate armed himself with a hatchet, and so did I: we had the affront of the night before to pay him off for. But the gentleman drew his sword, and used it in such an astonishingly rapid manner that we neither of us could get near him. I was about to hurl my hatchet at his head,—and I had a right to do so,

hadn't I, Monsieur? for a sailor aboard is master, as a citizen is in his chamber,—I was going, then, in self-defence, to cut the gentleman in two, when all at once (believe me or not, Monsieur) the great carriage-case opened of itself, I don't know how, and there came out of it a sort of a phantom, his head covered with a black helmet and a black mask, something terrible to look upon, which came towards me threatening with its fist."—"And that was?" said Athos.—"That was the Devil, Monsieur,—for the gentleman, with great glee, cried out on seeing him, 'Ah, thank you, Monseigneur!'"

"A strange story!" murmured the count, looking at Raoul. —"And what did you do?" asked the latter of the fisherman. —"You must know, Monsieur, that two poor men like us were already too few to fight against two gentlemen; but against the Devil, ah! Well, we didn't stop to consult each other,—we made but one jump into the sea, for we were within seven or eight hundred feet of the shore."—"Well, and then?"—"Why, and then, Monseigneur, as there was a little wind from the south-west, the boat drifted into the sands of Ste. Marguerite."

"Oh! but the two travellers?"—"Bah! you need not be uneasy about them! It was pretty plain that one was the Devil, and protected the other,—for when we recovered the boat, after she got afloat again, instead of finding these two creatures injured by the shock, we found nothing, not even the carriage-case."

"Very strange! very strange!" repeated the count. "But since that what have you done, my friend?"—"I made my complaint to the governor of Ste. Marguerite, who brought my finger under my nose while telling me if I plagued him with such silly stories he would have me flogged."—"What! did the governor say so?"—"Yes, Monsieur; and yet my boat was injured, seriously injured, for the prow is left upon the point of Ste. Marguerite, and the carpenter asks a hundred and twenty livres to repair it."—"Very well," replied Raoul; "you will be exempted from the service. Go."

"We will go to Ste. Marguerite, shall we?" said the count to Bragelonne, as the man walked away.—"Yes, Monsieur, for there is something to be cleared up; that man does not seem to me to have told the truth."—"Nor to me, Raoul. The story of the masked man and the carriage-case having disappeared may be told to conceal some violence these fellows have committed upon their passenger in the open sea, to punish him for his persistence in embarking."

Digitized by Google

"I formed the same suspicion; the carriage-case was more likely to contain property than a man."—"We shall see to that, Raoul. This gentleman very much resembles D'Artagnan; I recognise his mode of proceeding. Alas! we are no longer the young invincibles of former days. Who knows whether the hatchet or the iron bar of this miserable coaster has not succeeded in doing that which the best blades of Europe, balls, and bullets have not been able to do in forty years?"

That same day they set out for Ste. Marguerite's, on board a *chasse-marée* come from Toulon under orders. The impression they felt on landing was a singularly pleasing one. The isle was full of flowers and fruits. In its cultivated part it served as a garden for the governor. Orange, pomegranate and fig trees bent beneath the weight of their golden or purple fruits. All around this garden, in the uncultivated parts, the red partridges ran about in coveys among the brambles and tufts of junipers, and at every step of the count and Raoul a terrified rabbit quitted his thyme and heath to scuttle away to his burrow. In fact, this fortunate isle was uninhabited. Flat, offering nothing but a tiny bay for the convenience of embarkation, under the protection of the governor, who went shares with them, smugglers made use of it as a provisional *entrepôt*, under condition of not killing the game or devastating the garden. With this compromise, the governor was in a situation to be satisfied with a garrison of eight men to guard his fortress, in which twelve cannon accumulated their coats of mouldy green. The governor was a sort of happy farmer, harvesting wines, figs, oil, and oranges, preserving his citrons and *cédrats* in the sun of his casemates. The fortress, encircled by a deep ditch, its only guardian, raised like three heads its three turrets connected with one another by terraces covered with moss.

Athos and Raoul wandered for some time round the fences of the garden without finding any one to introduce them to the governor. They ended by making their own way into the garden. It was at the hottest time of the day. Everything sought shelter beneath grass or stone. The heavens spread their fiery veils as if to stifle all noises, to envelop all existences; the rabbit under the broom, the fly under the leaf, slept as the wave did beneath the heavens. Athos saw nothing living but a soldier upon the terrace beneath the second and third courts, who was carrying a basket of provisions on his head. This man returned almost immediately without his basket, and disappeared in the shade of his sentry-box. Athos supposed this

man must have been carrying dinner to some one, and after having done so, returned to dine himself. All at once they heard some one call out, and raising their heads, perceived in the frame of the bars of the window something of a white colour, like a hand that was waved backwards and forwards,—something shining, like a polished weapon struck by the rays of the sun. And before they were able to ascertain what it was they saw, a luminous train accompanied by a hissing sound in the air called their attention from the donjon to the ground. A second dull noise was heard from the ditch, and Raoul ran to pick up a silver plate which was rolling along the dry sand. The hand which had thrown this plate made a sign to the two gentlemen and then disappeared. Athos and Raoul, approaching each other, began an attentive examination of the dusty plate; and they discovered, in characters traced upon the bottom of it with the point of a knife, this inscription:—

"I AM THE BROTHER OF THE KING OF FRANCE: A PRISONER TO-DAY, A MADMAN TO-MORROW. FRENCH GENTLEMEN AND CHRISTIANS, PRAY TO GOD FOR THE SOUL AND THE REASON OF THE SON OF YOUR MASTERS."

The plate fell from the hands of Athos while Raoul was endeavouring to make out the meaning of these dismal words. At the same instant they heard a cry from the top of the donjon. As quick as lightning Raoul bent down his head, and forced down that of his father likewise. A musket-barrel glittered from the crest of the wall. A white smoke floated like a plume from the mouth of the musket, and a ball was flattened against a stone within six inches of the two gentlemen. Another musket appeared, which was aimed at them.

"*Cordieu!*" cried Athos. "What! are people assassinated here? Come down, cowards as you are!"—"Yes, come down!" cried Raoul, furiously shaking his fist at the citadel.

One of the assailants—he who was about to fire—replied to these cries by an exclamation of surprise; and as his companion, who wished to continue the attack, had reseized his loaded musket, he who had cried out threw up the weapon, and the ball flew into the air. Athos and Raoul, seeing them disappear from the platform, expected that they would come to them, and waited with a firm demeanour. Five minutes had not elapsed when a stroke upon a drum called the eight soldiers of the garrison to arms, and they showed themselves on the other

side of the ditch with their muskets in hand. At the head of these men was an officer, whom Athos and Raoul recognised as the one who had fired the first musket. The man ordered the soldiers to "make ready." "We are going to be shot!" cried Raoul; "but, sword in hand, at least let us leap the ditch. We shall certainly kill two of these scoundrels when their muskets are empty."

And suiting the action to the word, Raoul was springing forward, followed by Athos, when a well-known voice resounded behind them, "Athos! Raoul!"—"D'Artagnan!" replied the two gentlemen.

"Recover arms! *Mordioux!*" cried the captain to the soldiers. "I was sure I could not be mistaken!"—"What is the meaning of this?" asked Athos. "What! were we to be shot without warning?"—"It was I who was going to shoot you; and if the governor missed you, I should not have missed you, my dear friends. How fortunate it is that I am accustomed to take a long aim, instead of firing at the instant I raise my weapon! I thought I recognised you. Ah, my dear friends, how fortunate!" and D'Artagnan wiped his brow,—for he had run fast, and emotion with him was not feigned.

"How!" said Athos; "and is the gentleman who fired at us the governor of the fortress?"—"In person."—"And why did he fire at us? What have we done to him?"—"*Pardieu!* You received what the prisoner threw to you?"—"That is true."—"That plate,—the prisoner has written something on the bottom of it, has he not?"—"Yes."—"Good heavens! I was afraid he had."

And D'Artagnan, with all the marks of mortal alarm, seized the plate to read the inscription. When he had read it, a fearful pallor spread over his countenance. "Oh, good heavens!" repeated he. "Silence! here is the governor."—"And what will he do to us? Is it our fault?" asked Raoul.—"It is true, then?" said Athos, in a subdued voice; "it is true?"

"Silence, I tell you, silence! If he only believes you can read, if he only suspects you have understood— I love you, my dear friends, I will be killed for you; but—"—"'But—'" said Athos to Raoul.—"But I could not save you from perpetual imprisonment, if I saved you from death. Silence, then! silence again!"

The governor came up, having crossed the ditch upon a plank bridge. "Well," said he to D'Artagnan, "what stops us?"—"You are Spaniards; you do not understand a word of French,"

said the captain, eagerly to his friends in a low voice. "Well!" replied he, addressing the governor, "I was right; these gentlemen are two Spanish captains with whom I was acquainted at Ypres, last year. They don't know a word of French."—"Ah!" said the governor, sharply. "And yet they were trying to read the inscription on the plate."

D'Artagnan took it out of his hands, effacing the characters with the point of his sword. "How!" cried the governor; "what are you doing? I cannot read them now!"—"It is a state secret," replied D'Artagnan, bluntly; "and as you know that according to the king's orders it is under the penalty of death that any one should penetrate it, I will, if you like, allow you to read it and have you shot immediately afterwards."

During this apostrophe—half serious, half ironical—Athos and Raoul preserved the coolest, most unconcerned silence. "But, is it possible," said the governor, "that these gentlemen do not comprehend at least some words?"—"Suppose they do! If they do understand a few spoken words it does not follow that they should understand what is written. They cannot even read Spanish. A noble Spaniard, remember, ought never to know how to read."

The governor was obliged to be satisfied with these explanations; but he was still tenacious. "Invite these gentlemen to come to the fortress," said he.—"That I will willingly do. I was about to propose it to you." The fact is, the captain had quite another idea, and would have wished his friends a hundred leagues off. But he was obliged to make the best of it. He addressed the two gentlemen in Spanish, giving them a polite invitation, which they accepted. They all turned towards the entrance of the fort, and the incident being exhausted, the eight soldiers returned to their delightful leisure, for a moment disturbed by this unexpected adventure.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXXVIII

CAPTIVE AND JAILERS

When they had entered the fort, and while the governor was making some preparations for the reception of his guests, "Come," said Athos, "let us have a word of explanation while we are alone."—"It is simply this," replied the musketeer. "I have conducted hither a prisoner, who the king commands shall not be seen. You came here; he has thrown something to you through the lattice of his window. I was at dinner with the governor; I saw the object thrown, and I saw Raoul pick it up. It does not take long to understand this. I understood it; and I thought you in intelligence with my prisoner. And then—"

"And then—you commanded us to be shot."—"*Ma foi!* I admit it; but if I was the first to seize a musket, fortunately I was the last to take aim at you."—"If you had killed me, D'Artagnan, I should have had the good fortune to die for the royal house of France; and it would be an honour to die by your hand,—you, its noblest and most loyal defender."

"What the devil, Athos, do you mean by the royal house?" stammered D'Artagnan. "You don't mean that you, a well-informed and sensible man, can place any faith in the nonsense written by an idiot?"—"I do believe in it."—"With the more reason, my dear Chevalier, for your having orders to kill all those who do believe in it," said Raoul.

"That is because," replied the captain of the musketeers,—"because every calumny, however absurd it may be, has the almost certain chance of becoming popular."—"No, D'Artagnan," replied Athos, in a low tone; "but because the king is not willing that the secret of his family should transpire among the people, and cover with shame the executioners of the son of Louis XIII."

"Do not talk in such a childish manner, Athos, or I shall begin to think you have lost your senses. Besides, explain to me how it is possible Louis XIII. should have a son in the Isle of Ste. Marguerite?"—"A son whom you have brought hither masked, in a fishing-boat," said Athos. "Why not?" D'Artagnan was brought to a pause. "Ah, ah!" said he; "whence do you know that a fishing-boat—"—"Brought you to Ste. Marguerite with the carriage-case containing the prisoner,

Digitized by Google

—with a prisoner whom you styled Monseigneur. Oh, I am acquainted with all that," resumed the count. D'Artagnan bit his moustache.

"If it were true," said he, "that I had brought hither in a boat and with a carriage a masked prisoner, nothing proves that this prisoner must be a prince,—a prince of the house of France."—"Oh! ask that of Aramis," replied Athos, coolly.—"Of Aramis!" cried the musketeer, quite at a stand. "Have you seen Aramis?"—"After his discomfiture at Vaux, yes. I have seen Aramis, a fugitive, pursued, ruined; and Aramis has told me enough to make me believe in the complaints that this unfortunate young man inscribed upon the silver plate."

D'Artagnan's head sunk upon his breast with confusion. "This is the way," said he, "in which God turns to nothing that which men call their wisdom! A fine secret must that be of which twelve or fifteen persons hold the tattered fragments! Athos, cursed be the chance which has brought you face to face with me in this affair! for now—"

"Well," said Athos, with his customary mild severity, "is your secret lost because I know it? Consult your memory, my friend. Have I not borne secrets as heavy as this?"—"You have never borne one so dangerous," replied D'Artagnan, in a tone of sadness. "I have something like a sinister idea that all who are concerned with this secret will die, and die unfortunately."—"The will of God be done!" said Athos; "but here is your governor."

D'Artagnan and his friends immediately resumed their parts. The governor, suspicious and hard, behaved towards D'Artagnan with a politeness almost amounting to obsequiousness. With respect to the travellers, he contented himself with offering them good cheer, and never taking his eye from them. Athos and Raoul observed that he often tried to embarrass them by sudden attacks, or to catch them off their guard; but neither the one nor the other gave him the least advantage. What D'Artagnan had said was probable, if the governor did not believe it to be quite true. They rose from the table to repose awhile.

"What is this man's name? I don't like the looks of him," said Athos to D'Artagnan, in Spanish.—"De Saint-Mars," replied the captain.—"He will be, then, the prince's jailer?"—"Eh! how can I tell? I may be kept at Ste. Marguerite for ever."

"Oh, no, not you!"—"My friend, I am in the situation of a

Digitized by Google

man who finds a treasure in the midst of a desert. He would like to carry it away, but he cannot; he would like to leave it, but he dare not. The king will not dare to recall me, for fear no one else would serve him as faithfully as I; he regrets not having me near him, from being aware that no one will be of so much service near his person as myself. But it will happen as it may please God."—"But," observed Raoul, "your not being certain proves that your situation here is provisional, and you will return to Paris."

"Ask these gentlemen," interrupted the governor, "what was their purpose in coming to Ste. Marguerite."—"They came because they had heard that there was a convent of Benedictines at St. Honorat which is considered curious; and from being told there was excellent shooting in the island."—"That is quite at their service, as well as yours," replied De Saint-Mars. D'Artagnan politely thanked him. "When will they depart?" added the governor.—"To-morrow," replied D'Artagnan.

M. de Saint-Mars went to make his rounds, and left D'Artagnan alone with the pretended Spaniards. "Oh!" exclaimed the musketeer, "here is a life with a society that suits me but little. I command this man; and he bores me, *mordioux!* Come, let us have a shot or two at the rabbits; the walk will be beautiful, and not fatiguing. The isle is but a league and a half in length, upon a breadth of a league,—a real park. Let us try to amuse ourselves."—"As you please, D'Artagnan; not for the sake of amusing ourselves, but to gain an opportunity for talking freely."

D'Artagnan made a sign to a soldier, who brought the gentlemen some guns, and then returned to the fort. "And now," said the musketeer, "answer me the question put to you by that black-looking Saint-Mars. What did you come to do at the Lérins Isles?"—"To bid you farewell."—"Bid me farewell! What do you mean by that? Is Raoul going anywhere?"—"Yes."—"Then I will lay a wager it is with M. de Beaufort."—"With M. de Beaufort it is, my dear friend; you always guess rightly."—"From habit."

While the two friends were beginning their conversation, Raoul, with his head hanging down and his heart oppressed, seated himself on a mossy rock, his gun across his knees, looking at the sea, looking at the heavens, and listening to the voice of his soul; he allowed the sportsmen to attain a considerable distance from him. D'Artagnan remarked his absence.

"He has not recovered the blow?" said he to Athos.—"He is struck to death."—"Oh! your fears exaggerate, I hope. Raoul is of a fine nature. Around all hearts so noble as his there is a second envelope which forms a cuirass. The first bleeds, the second resists."—"No," replied Athos, "Raoul will die of it."

"*Mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan, in a melancholy tone; and he did not add a word to this exclamation. Then, a minute after, "Why do you let him go?"—"Because he insists upon going."—"And why do you not go with him?"—"Because I could not bear to see him die."

D'Artagnan looked his friend earnestly in the face. "You know one thing," continued the count, leaning upon the arm of the captain,—"you know that in the course of my life I have been afraid of but few things. Well! I have an incessant, gnawing, insurmountable fear that a day will arrive in which I shall hold the dead body of that boy in my arms."—"Oh!" murmured D'Artagnan; "oh!"—"He will die, I know,—I have a conviction of that; but I would not see him die."

"How is this, Athos? you come and place yourself in the presence of the bravest man you say you have ever seen,—of your own D'Artagnan, of that man without an equal, as you formerly called him,—and you come and tell him with your arms folded that you are afraid of witnessing the death of your son, you who have seen all that can be seen in this world! Why have you this fear, Athos? Man upon this earth must expect everything, and ought to face everything."

"Listen to me, my friend. After having worn myself out upon this earth of which you speak, I have preserved but two religions: that of life,—my friendships, my duty as a father; that of eternity,—love and respect for God. Now, I have within me the revelation that if God should decree that my friend or my son should render up his last sigh in my presence,—oh, no, I cannot even tell you, D'Artagnan!"—"Speak, speak! tell me!"—"I am strong against everything, except against the death of those I love. For that only there is no remedy, He who dies, gains; he who sees others die, loses. No; this it is,—to know that I should no more meet upon earth him whom I now behold with joy; to know that there would nowhere be a D'Artagnan any more, nowhere again be a Raoul,—oh! I am old, see you, I have no longer courage. I pray God to spare me in my weakness; but if he struck me so plainly and in that fashion, I should curse him. A Christian gentleman

ought not to curse his God, D'Artagnan; it is quite enough to have cursed his king!"

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan, a little confused by this violent tempest of grief.—"D'Artagnan, my friend, you who love Raoul, look at him," he added, pointing to his son; "see that melancholy which never leaves him. Can you imagine anything more dreadful than to witness, minute by minute, the ceaseless agony of that poor soul?"

"Let me speak to him, Athos. Who knows?"—"Try, if you please, but I am convinced you will not succeed."—"I will not attempt to console him, I will serve him."—"You will?"—"Doubtless. Do you think this would be the first time a woman had repented of an infidelity? I will go to him, I tell you."

Athos shook his head, and continued his walk alone. D'Artagnan, cutting across the brambles, rejoined Raoul, and held out his hand to him. "Well, Raoul! you have something to say to me?"—"I have a kindness to ask of you," replied Bragelonne.—"Ask it, then."—"You will some day return to France?"—"I hope so."—"Ought I to write to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"—"No; you must not."—"But I have so many things to say to her."—"Come and say them to her, then."—"Never!"

"Pray, what virtue do you attribute to a letter which your speech might not possess?"—"Perhaps you are right."—"She loves the king," said D'Artagnan, bluntly; "and she is an honest girl." Raoul started. "And you, you whom she abandons," added the captain, "she perhaps loves better than she does the king, but after another fashion."

"D'Artagnan, do you believe she loves the king?"—"To idolatry. Her heart is inaccessible to any other feeling. You might continue to live near her, and would be her best friend."—"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, with a passionate burst of repugnance for such a painful hope.—"Will you do so?"—"It would be base."

"That is a very absurd word, which would lead me to think slightly of your understanding. Please to understand, Raoul, that it is never base to do that which is imposed by a superior force. If your heart says to you, 'Go there, or die,' why, go there, Raoul. Was she base or brave, she whom you loved, in preferring the king to you,—the king whom her heart commanded her imperiously to prefer to you? No, she was the bravest of women. Do, then, as she has done. Obey yourself. Do you know one thing of which I am sure, Raoul?"

Digitized by Google

"What is that?"—"Why, that by seeing her closely with the eyes of a jealous man—"—"Well?"—"Well; you would cease to love her."—"Then I am decided, my dear D'Artagnan."—"To set off to see her again?"—"No; to set off that I may never see her again. I wish to love her for ever."

"Frankly," replied the musketeer, "that is a conclusion which I was far from expecting."—"This is what I wish, my friend. You will see her again, and you will give her a letter which, if you think proper, will explain to her as to yourself what is passing in my heart. Read it; I prepared it last night. Something told me I should see you to-day." He held the letter out, and D'Artagnan read it:—

"MADEMOISELLE,—You are not wrong in my eyes in not loving me. You have only been guilty of one fault towards me,—that of having left me to believe you loved me. This error will cost me my life. I pardon you; but I cannot pardon myself. It is said that happy lovers are deaf to the complaints of rejected lovers. It will not be so with you who did not love me except with anxiety. I am sure that if I had persisted in endeavouring to change that friendship into love, you would have yielded through fear of bringing about my death, or of lessening the esteem I had for you. It is much more delightful to me to die, knowing you are free and satisfied. How much, then, will you love me when you will no longer fear either my presence or my reproaches! You will love me, because, however charming a new love may appear to you, God has not made me in anything inferior to him you have chosen, and because my devotedness, my sacrifice, and my painful end will assure me, in your eyes, a certain superiority over him. I have allowed to escape, in the candid credulity of my heart, the treasure I possessed. Many people tell me that you loved me to such a degree that you might have come to love me much. That idea takes from my mind all bitterness, and leads me only to blame myself. You will accept this last farewell, and you will bless me for having taken refuge in the inviolable asylum where all hatred is extinguished, and where all love endures for ever. Adieu, Mademoiselle. If your happiness could be purchased by the last drop of my blood, I would shed that drop. I willingly make the sacrifice of it to my misery! RAOUL, VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE."

"The letter is very well," said the captain. "I have only one fault to find with it."—"Tell me what that is," said Raoul.

—" It is that it tells everything except the thing which exhales, like a mortal poison, from your eyes and from your heart; except the senseless love which still consumes you." Raoul grew paler, but remained silent.

" Why did you not write simply these words:—

"' MADEMOISELLE,—Instead of cursing you, I love you and I die.' "

" That is true," exclaimed Raoul, with a sinister joy. And tearing the letter he had just taken back, he wrote the following words upon a leaf of his tablets:—

" To procure the happiness of once more telling you that I love you, I commit the baseness of writing to you; and to punish myself for that baseness, I die."

And he signed it. " You will give her these tablets, Captain, will you not? "—" When? " asked the latter.—" On the day," said Bragelonne, pointing to the last sentence,—" on the day when you can place a date under these words." And he sprang away quickly to join Athos, who was returning with slow steps.

As they re-entered the fort, the sea rose with that rapid, gusty vehemence which characterises the Mediterranean; the ill-humour of the element became a tempest. Something shapeless, and tossed about violently by the waves, appeared just off the coast.

" What is that? " said Athos,—" a wrecked boat? "—" No, it is not a boat," said D'Artagnan.—" Pardon me," said Raoul; " there is a bark gaining the port rapidly."—" Yes, there is a bark in the creek, which is prudently seeking shelter here; but that which Athos points to in the sand is not a boat at all, —it has run aground."—" Yes, yes, I see it."—" It is the carriage-case, which I threw into the sea after landing the prisoner."

" Well," said Athos, " if you will take my advice, D'Artagnan, you will burn it, in order that no vestige of it may remain; or the fishermen of Antibes, who have believed they had to do with the Devil, will endeavour to prove that your prisoner was but a man."—" Your advice is good, Athos, and I will this night have it carried out, or rather, I will carry it out myself; but let us go in, for the rain falls heavily, and the lightning is terrific."

As they were passing over the ramparts to a gallery of which D'Artagnan had the key, they saw M. de Saint-Mars directing

his steps towards the chamber inhabited by the prisoner. Upon a sign from D'Artagnan, they concealed themselves in an angle of the staircase. "What is it?" said Athos.—"You will see. Look! the prisoner is returning from chapel."

And by the red flashes of the lightning against the violet fog which the wind spread upon the background of the sky, they saw pass gravely, at six paces behind the governor, a man clothed in black and masked by a visor of polished steel soldered to a helmet of the same nature, which altogether enveloped the whole of his head. The fire of the heavens cast red reflections upon the polished surface, and these reflections, flying off capriciously, seemed to be angry looks launched by this unfortunate, instead of imprecations. In the middle of the gallery, the prisoner stopped for a moment to contemplate the infinite horizon, to inhale the sulphurous perfumes of the tempest, to drink in thirstily the hot rain, and to breathe a sigh resembling a smothered roar. "Come on, Monsieur," said De Saint-Mars, sharply to the prisoner, for he already became uneasy at seeing him look so long beyond the walls. "Monsieur, come on!"

"Say Monseigneur!" cried Athos, from his corner, with a voice so solemn and terrible that the governor trembled from head to foot. Athos always wished respect to be paid to fallen majesty. The prisoner turned round. "Who spoke?" asked De Saint-Mars.—"It was I," replied D'Artagnan, showing himself promptly. "You know that is the order."—"Call me neither Monsieur nor Monseigneur," said the prisoner in his turn, in a voice that penetrated to the very soul of Raoul; "call me ACCURSED!" He passed on, and the iron door creaked after him.

"That is truly an unfortunate man!" murmured the musketeer, in a hollow whisper, pointing out to Raoul the chamber inhabited by the prince.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXXXIX

PROMISES

SCARCELY had D'Artagnan re-entered his apartment with his two friends, when one of the soldiers of the fort came to inform him that the governor was seeking for him. The bark which Raoul had perceived at sea, and which appeared so eager to gain the port, came to Ste. Marguerite with an important despatch for the captain of the musketeers. On opening it, D'Artagnan recognised the writing of the king: "I should think," said Louis XIV., "that you must have completed the execution of my orders, M. d'Artagnan; return then immediately to Paris, and join me at the Louvre."—"There is the end of my exile!" cried the musketeer, with joy; "God be praised, I am no longer a jailer!" and he showed the letter to Athos.

"So then you must leave us?" replied the latter, in a melancholy tone.—"Yes; but to meet again, dear friend, seeing that Raoul is old enough now to go alone with M. de Beaufort, and will prefer that his father should go back in company with M. d'Artagnan, rather than that he should travel two hundred leagues solitarily to reach home at La Fère; would you not, Raoul?"—"Certainly," stammered the latter, with an expression of tender regret.

"No, no, my friend," interrupted Athos, "I will never quit Raoul till the day his vessel shall have disappeared on the horizon. As long as he remains in France, he shall not be separated from me."—"As you please, dear friend; but we will, at least, leave Ste. Marguerite together. Take advantage of the bark which will convey me back to Antibes."—"With all my heart; we cannot too soon be at a distance from this fort, and from the spectacle which saddened us so just now."

The three friends quitted the little isle, after paying their respects to the governor, and by the last flashes of the departing tempest they took their farewell of the white walls of the fort. D'Artagnan parted from his friends that same night, after having seen fire set to the carriage-case upon the shore by the orders of De Saint-Mars, according to the advice the captain had given him. Before getting on horseback, and after leaving the arms of Athos, "My friends," said he, "you too much resemble two soldiers who are abandoning their post. Some-

Digitized by Google

thing warns me that Raoul will require being supported by you in his rank. Will you allow me to ask permission to go over into Africa with a hundred good muskets? The king will not refuse me, and I will take you with me."—"M. d'Artagnan," replied Raoul, pressing his hand with emotion, "thanks for that offer, which would give us more than we wish, either Monsieur the Count or I. I, who am young, stand in need of labour of mind and fatigue of body; Monsieur the Count wants the profoundest repose. You are his best friend. I recommend him to your care. In watching over him, you will hold both our souls in your hands."

"I must go; my horse is all in a fret," said D'Artagnan, with whom the most manifest sign of a lively emotion was the change of ideas in a conversation. "Come, Count, how many days longer has Raoul to stay here?"—"Three days at most."—"And how long will it take you to reach home?"—"Oh, a considerable time," replied Athos. "I shall not like the idea of being separated too quickly from Raoul. Time will travel too fast of itself to require me to aid it by distance. I shall only make half-stages."

"And why so, my friend? Nothing is more dull than travelling slowly; and hostelry life does not become a man like you."—"My friend, I came hither on post-horses; but I wish to purchase two animals of a superior kind. Now, to take them home fresh, it would not be prudent to make them travel more than seven or eight leagues a day."

"Where is Grimaud?"—"He arrived yesterday morning with Raoul's appointments; and I have left him to sleep."—"That is, never to come back again," D'Artagnan suffered to escape him. "Till we meet again, then, dear Athos; and if you are diligent, well, I shall embrace you the sooner." So saying, he put his foot in the stirrup, which Raoul held.

"Farewell!" said the young man, embracing him. "Farewell!" said D'Artagnan, as he got into his saddle. His horse made a movement which divided the cavalier from his friends.

This scene had taken place in front of the house chosen by Athos, near the gates of Antibes, whither D'Artagnan, after his supper, had ordered his horses to be brought. The road began there, and extended white and undulating in the vapours of the night. The horse eagerly inhaled the salt sharp perfume of the marshes. D'Artagnan put him into a trot; and Athos and Raoul sadly turned towards the house. All at once they heard the rapid approach of a horse's steps, and at first believed it

to be one of those singular echoes which deceive the ear at every turn in a road; but it was really the return of the horseman. They uttered a cry of joyous surprise; and the captain, springing to the ground like a young man, seized within his arms the two beloved forms of Athos and Raoul. He held them long embraced thus, without speaking a word, or suffering the sigh which was bursting his breast to escape him. Then, as rapidly as he had come back, he set off again, with a sharp application of his spurs to the sides of his fiery horse. "Alas!" said the count, in a low voice, "alas! alas!"—"Evil presage!" on his side said D'Artagnan to himself, making up for lost time. "I could not smile upon them. An evil presage!"

The next day Grimaud was on foot again. The service commanded by M. de Beaufort was happily accomplished. The flotilla, sent to Toulon by the exertions of Raoul, had set out, dragging after it in little nutshells almost invisible, the wives and friends of the fishermen and smugglers impressed into the service of the fleet. The time, so short, which remained for the father and the son to live together, appeared to have doubled the rapidity of its flight, as the swiftness of everything increases which moves towards the gulf of eternity. Athos and Raoul returned to Toulon, which place began to be filled with the noise of carriages, the noise of arms, the noise of neighing horses. The trumpeters sounded their spirited marches; the drummers signalised their strength; the streets were overflowing with soldiers, servants, and tradespeople. The Duc de Beaufort was everywhere, superintending the embarkation with the zeal and interest of a good captain. He encouraged even the most humble of his companions; he scolded his lieutenants, even those of the highest rank. Artillery, provisions, baggage,—he insisted upon seeing all himself. He examined the equipment of every soldier; he assured himself of the health and soundness of every horse. It was plain that light, boastful, and egotistical in his hotel, the gentleman became the soldier again, the high noble a captain, in face of the responsibility he had accepted. And yet it must be admitted that whatever was the care with which he presided over the preparations for departure, it was easy to perceive careless precipitation, and the absence of all the precaution which makes the French soldier the first soldier in the world, because he is the most abandoned to his own physical and moral resources.

All things having satisfied, or appearing to have satisfied, the admiral, he paid his compliments to Raoul, and gave the last

orders for sailing the next morning at daybreak. He invited the count and his son to dine with him; but they, under a pretext of the service, kept themselves apart. Gaining their hostelry, situated under the trees of the great place, they took their repast in haste; and Athos led Raoul to the rocks which command the city,—vast grey mountains, whence the view is infinite, and embraces a liquid horizon which appears, so remote is it, on a level with the rocks themselves. The night was fine, as it always is in these happy climates. The moon, rising behind the rocks, spread out like a silver sheet upon the blue carpet of the sea. In the roadsteads manœuvred silently the vessels which had just taken their places to facilitate the embarkation. The sea, loaded with phosphoric light, opened beneath the hulls of the barks which transported the baggage and munitions; every dip of the prow ploughed up this gulf of white flames, and from every oar dropped liquid diamonds. The sailors, rejoicing in the largesses of the admiral, were heard murmuring their slow and artless songs. Sometimes the grinding of the chains was mixed with the dull noise of shot falling into the holds. These harmonies and this spectacle oppress the heart like fear, and dilate it like hope. All this life speaks of death.

Athos had seated himself with his son upon the moss, among the brambles of the promontory. Around their heads passed and repassed large bats, carried along in the fearful whirl of their blind chase. The feet of Raoul were across the edge of the cliff, and hung in that void which engenders vertigo and incites to self-destruction. When the moon had risen to its full height, caressing with its light the neighbouring peaks, when the watery mirror was illumined to its full extent, and the little red fires had made their openings in the black masses of every ship, Athos collected all his ideas and all his courage, and said, "God has made all that we see, Raoul; he has made us also,—poor atoms mixed up with this great universe. We shine like those fires and those stars; we sigh like those waves; we suffer like those great ships, which are worn out in ploughing the waves, in obeying the wind which urges them towards an end, as the breath of God blows us towards a port. Everything likes to live, Raoul; and all is beautiful in living things."—"Monsieur," said Raoul, "we have before us a beautiful spectacle!"

"How good D'Artagnan is!" interrupted Athos, suddenly; "and what a rare good fortune it is to be supported during a whole life by such a friend as he is! That is what you have wanted, Raoul."—"A friend!" cried Raoul; "I have wanted

a friend!"—"M. de Guiche is an agreeable companion," resumed the count, coldly; "but I believe in the times in which you live men are more engaged in their own interests and their own pleasures than they were in our times. You have sought a secluded life; that is a great happiness, but you have lost your strength in it. We four, more weaned from these delicate abstractions which constitute your joy,—we found in ourselves much greater powers of resistance when misfortune came."—"I have not interrupted you, Monsieur, to tell you that I had a friend, and that that friend is M. Guiche. Certainly he is good and generous, and moreover he loves me; but I have lived under the guard of another friendship, Monsieur, as precious and as strong as that of which you speak, since that is yours."—"I have not been a friend for you, Raoul," said Athos.—"Eh, Monsieur! and in what respect not?"—"Because I have given you reason to think that life has but one face; because, sad and severe, alas! I have always cut off for you—without, God knows, wishing to do so—the joyous buds which incessantly spring from the tree of youth; so that at this moment I repent not having made of you a more expansive, dissipated, animated man."

"I know why you say that, Monsieur. No, it is not you who have made me what I am,—it is love, which took possession of me at the time when children have only inclinations; it is the constancy natural to my character, which with other creatures is but a habit. I believed that I should always be as I was; I thought God had cast me in a path quite cleared, quite straight, bordered with fruits and flowers. I had watching over me your vigilance and your strength. I believed myself to be vigilant and strong. Nothing prepared me; I fell once, and that once deprived me of courage for the whole of my life. It is quite true that I wrecked myself. Oh, no, Monsieur! you are nothing in my past but a happiness; you are nothing in my future but a hope! No, I have no reproach to make against life, such as you made it for me; I bless you, and I love you ardently."

"My dear Raoul, your words do me good; they prove to me that you will act a little for me in the time to come."—"I shall act only for you, Monsieur."—"Raoul, what I have never hitherto done with respect to you, I will henceforward do; I will be your friend, not your father. We will live in expanding ourselves, instead of living and holding ourselves prisoners, when you come back; and that will be soon, will it not?"—

"Certainly, Monsieur,—for such an expedition cannot be of long duration."

"Soon, then, Raoul, soon, instead of living moderately upon my income, I will give you the capital of my estates; it will suffice for launching you into the world till my death,—and you will give me, I hope, before that time, the consolation of not seeing my race extinct."—"I will do all you shall command," said Raoul, much agitated.

"It is not necessary, Raoul, that your duty as aide-de-camp should lead you into too hazardous enterprises. You have gone through your ordeal; you are known to be good under fire. Remember that war with the Arabs is a war of snares, ambuscades, and assassinations."—"So it is said, Monsieur."—"There is never much glory in falling in an ambuscade. It is a death which always implies some rashness or want of foresight. Often, indeed, he who falls in it meets with but little pity. They who are not pitied, Raoul, have died uselessly. Still further, the conqueror laughs, and we Frenchmen ought not to allow stupid infidels to triumph over our mistakes. Do you clearly understand what I am saying to you, Raoul? God forbid I should encourage you to avoid encounters!"—"I am naturally prudent, Monsieur, and I have very good fortune," said Raoul, with a smile which chilled the heart of his poor father; "for," the young man hastened to add, "in twenty combats in which I have been, I have only received one scratch."

"There is in addition," said Athos, "the climate to be dreaded; that is an ugly end, that fever! King Saint-Louis prayed God to send him an arrow or the plague, rather than the fever."—"Oh, Monsieur! with sobriety, with due exercise—"—"I have already obtained from M. de Beaufort a promise that his despatches shall be sent off every fortnight to France. You, as his aide-de-camp, will be charged with expediting them, and will be sure not to forget me?"—"No, Monsieur," said Raoul, almost choked with emotion.

"Besides, Raoul, as you are a good Christian, and I am one also, we ought to reckon upon a more special protection of God and his guardian angels. Promise me that if anything evil should happen to you on any occasion, you will think of me at once."—"First and at once! Oh, yes, Monsieur!"—"And will call upon me?"—"Instantly."—"You dream of me sometimes, do you not, Raoul?"—"Every night, Monsieur. During my early youth I saw you in my dreams, calm and mild, with

one hand stretched out over my head; and that it was that made me sleep so soundly—*formerly*."

"We love each other so dearly," said the count, "that from this moment in which we separate a portion of both our souls will travel with one and the other of us, and will dwell wherever we may dwell. Whenever you may be sad, Raoul, I feel that my heart will be drowned in sadness; and when you smile on thinking of me, be assured you will send me, from however remote a distance, a ray of your joy."—"I will not promise you to be joyous," replied the young man; "but you may be certain that I will never pass an hour without thinking of you,—not one hour, I swear, unless I be dead."

Athos could contain himself no longer; he threw his arm round the neck of his son, and held him embraced with all the power of his heart. The moon began to be now eclipsed by twilight; a golden band mounted on the horizon announcing the approach of day. Athos threw his cloak over the shoulders of Raoul, and led him back to the city, where burdens and porters were already in motion, as in a vast ant-hill. At the end of the plateau which Athos and Bragelonne were quitting, they saw a dark shadow moving backwards and forwards, as if in indecision or ashamed to be seen. It was Grimaud, who in his anxiety had tracked his master, and was waiting for him. "Oh, my good Grimaud," cried Raoul, "what do you want? You have come to tell us it is time to go, have you not?"

"Alone?" said Grimaud, addressing Athos, and pointing to Raoul in a tone of reproach, which showed to what an extent the old man was troubled.—"Oh, you are right!" cried the count. "No, Raoul shall not go alone; no, he shall not be left alone in a strange land without some friendly hand to support him, some friendly heart to recall to him all he loved!"—"I?" said Grimaud.—"You? yes, you!" cried Raoul, touched to his inmost heart.

"Alas!" said Athos, "you are very old, my good Grimaud."—"So much the better," replied the latter, with an inexpressible depth of feeling and intelligence.—"But the embarkation has begun," said Raoul, "and you are not prepared."—"Yes," said Grimaud, showing the keys of his trunks, mixed with those of his young master.

"But," again objected Raoul, "you cannot leave Monsieur the Count thus alone,—Monsieur the Count whom you have never quitted?" Grimaud turned his dimmed eyes upon Athos and Raoul, as if to measure the strength of both. The count

uttered not a word. "Monsieur the Count will prefer my going," said Grimaud.

"I should," said Athos, by an inclination of the head.

At that moment the drums suddenly rolled, and the clarions filled the air with their inspiring notes. The regiments destined for the expedition began to march out from the city. They advanced to the number of five, each composed of forty companies. Royals marched first, distinguished by their white uniform, faced with blue. The *ordonnance* colours, quartered crosswise, violet and dead leaf, with a sprinkling of golden *fleurs-de-lis*, left the white-coloured flag, with its *fleurdelisée* cross, to dominate over the whole. Musketeers at the wings, with their forked sticks in their hands and their muskets on their shoulders, and pikemen in the centre, with their lances, fourteen feet in length, marched gaily towards the transports, which carried them in detail to the ships. The regiments of Picardy, Navarre, Normandy, and Royal Vaisseau, followed after. M. de Beaufort had known well how to select his troops. He himself was seen closing the march with his staff; it would take him a full hour to reach the sea. Raoul with Athos turned his steps slowly towards the beach, in order to take his place when the prince embarked. Grimaud, acting with the ardour of a young man, superintended the embarkation of Raoul's baggage in the admiral's vessel. Athos, with his arm passed through that of the son he was about to lose, absorbed in melancholy meditation, was deaf to the noise around him. An officer came quickly towards them to inform Raoul that M. de Beaufort desired to have him by his side.

"Have the kindness to tell the prince," said Raoul, "that I request he will allow me this hour to enjoy the company of my father."—"No, no," said Athos; "an aide-de-camp ought not thus to quit his general. Please to tell the prince, Monsieur, that the viscount will join him immediately." The officer set off at a gallop.

"Whether we part here or part there," added the count, "it is no less a separation." He carefully brushed the dust off his son's coat, and passed his hand over his hair as they walked along. "But, Raoul," said he, "you want money. M. de Beaufort's train will be splendid, and I am certain it will be agreeable to you to purchase horses and arms, which are very dear things in Africa. Now, as you are not actually in the service of the king or of M. de Beaufort, and are simply a volunteer, you must not reckon upon either pay or largesses;

but I should not like you to want for anything at Djidgelli. Here are two hundred pistoles; if you would please me, Raoul, spend them."

Raoul pressed the hand of his father, and at the turning of a street they saw M. de Beaufort, mounted upon a magnificent white *genet*, which replied by graceful curvets to the applause of the women of the city. The duke called Raoul and held out his hand to the count, speaking to him for some time with such a kindly expression that the heart of the poor father felt a little comforted. It seemed, however, to both father and son that they were proceeding to a scene of torture. There was a terrible moment,—that at which on quitting the sands of the shore the soldiers and sailors exchanged the last kisses with their families and friends; a supreme moment, in which, notwithstanding the clearness of the heavens, the warmth of the sun, the perfumes of the air, and the rich life that was circulating in their veins, everything appeared black, everything appeared bitter, everything created doubts of a God, even while speaking by the mouth of God. It was customary for the admiral and his suite to embark last; the cannon waited to announce with its formidable voice that the leader had placed his foot on board his vessel. Athos, forgetful of both the admiral and the fleet, and of his own dignity as a strong man, opened his arms to his son, and pressed him convulsively to his heart.

"Accompany us on board," said the duke, very much affected; "you will gain a good half-hour."—"No," said Athos, "my farewell is spoken. I do not wish to speak a second."—"Then, Viscount, embark,—embark quickly!" added the prince, wishing to spare the tears of these two men, whose hearts were bursting. And paternally, tenderly, very much as Porthos might have done, he took Raoul in his arms and placed him in the boat; the oars of which, at a signal, immediately were dipped in the waves. He himself, forgetful of ceremony, jumped into his boat, and pushed it off with a vigorous foot.

"Adieu!" cried Raoul. Athos replied only by a sign, but he felt something burning on his hand; it was the respectful kiss of Grimaud,—the last farewell of the faithful servant. This kiss given, Grimaud jumped from the step of the pier upon the stem of a two-oared yawl, which had just been taken in tow by a *chaland* served by twelve galley-oars. Athos seated himself on the pier, stunned, deaf, abandoned. Every instant took from him one of the features, one of the shades of the pale face of his son. With his arms hanging down, his eyes fixed, his mouth

open, he remained confounded with Raoul,—in one same look, in one same thought, in one same stupor. The sea by degrees carried away boats and faces to that distance at which men become nothing but points, loves nothing but remembrances. Athos saw his son ascend the ladder of the admiral's ship; he saw him lean upon the rail of the deck, and place himself in such a manner as to be always an object in the eye of his father. In vain the cannon thundered; in vain from the ship sounded a long and loud tumult, responded to by immense acclamations from the shore; in vain did the noise deafen the ear of the father, and the smoke obscure the cherished object of all his aspirations. Raoul appeared to him up to the last moment; and the imperceptible atom, passing from black to pale, from pale to white, from white to nothing, disappeared from the view of Athos very long after, from all the eyes of the spectators, had disappeared both gallant ships and swelling sails.

Towards mid-day, when the sun devoured space, and scarcely the tops of the masts dominated the incandescent line of the sea, Athos perceived a soft, aerial shadow rise and vanish as soon as seen. This was the smoke of a cannon, which M. de Beaufort ordered to be fired as a last salute to the coast of France. The point was buried in its turn beneath the sky, and Athos returned painfully and slowly to his hostelry.

CHAPTER CCXL

AMONG WOMEN

D'Artagnan had not been able to hide his feelings from his friends so much as he would have wished. The stoical soldier, the impassible man-at-arms, overcome by fear and presentiments, had yielded for a few minutes to human weakness. When therefore he had silenced his heart and calmed the agitation of his nerves, turning towards his lackey, a silent servant, always listening in order to obey the more promptly, "Rabaud," said he, "mind, we must travel thirty leagues a day."—"At your pleasure, Captain," replied Rabaud.

And from that moment, D'Artagnan, accommodating his action to the pace of his horse, like a true centaur, employed his thoughts about nothing,—that is to say, about everything. He asked himself why the king had recalled him; why the Iron

Mask had thrown the silver plate at the feet of Raoul. As to the first subject, the reply was only of a negative character. He knew right well that the king's calling him was from necessity; he still further knew that Louis XIV. must experience an imperious want of a private conversation with one whom the possession of such a secret placed on a level with the highest powers of the kingdom; but as to saying exactly what the king's wish was, D'Artagnan found himself completely at a loss.

The musketeer had no longer any doubt as to the reason which had urged the unfortunate Philippe to reveal his character and his birth. Philippe hidden for ever beneath a mask of iron, exiled to a country where the men seemed little more than slaves of the elements; Philippe, deprived even of the society of D'Artagnan, who had loaded him with honours and delicate attentions,—had nothing more to look forward to than spectres and griefs in this world; and despair beginning to devour him, he poured himself forth in complaints, in the belief that his revelations would raise an avenger for him.

The manner in which the musketeer had been near killing his two best friends, the destiny which had so strangely brought Athos to participate in the great state secret, the farewell of Raoul, the obscurity of that future which threatened to end in a melancholy death,—all this threw D'Artagnan incessantly back to lamentable predictions and forebodings which the rapidity of his pace did not dissipate as it used formerly to do. D'Artagnan passed from these considerations to the remembrance of the proscribed Porthos and Aramis. He saw them both, fugitives, tracked, ruined,—laborious architects of a fortune they must lose; and as the king called for his man of execution in the hours of vengeance and malice, D'Artagnan trembled at the idea of receiving some commission that would make his very heart bleed. Sometimes when ascending hills, when the winded horse breathed hard from his nostrils, and heaved his flanks, the captain, left to more freedom of thought, reflected upon the prodigious genius of Aramis,—a genius of craft and intrigue, of which the Fronde and the civil war had produced but two similar examples. Soldier, priest, and diplomatist, gallant, avaricious, and cunning, Aramis had taken the good things of this life only as stepping-stones to rise to bad ones. Generous in spirit, if not high in heart, he never did ill but for the sake of shining a little more brilliantly. Towards the end of his career, at the moment of reaching the

goal, like the patrician Fiesco, he had made a false step upon a plank, and had fallen into the sea.

But Porthos, the good, simple Porthos! To see Porthos hungry; to see Mousqueton without gold lace, imprisoned, perhaps; to see Pierrefonds, Bracieux, razed to the very stones, dishonoured even to the timber,—these were so many poignant griefs for D'Artagnan, and every time that one of these griefs struck him he bounded like a horse at the sting of the gadfly beneath the vaults of foliage where he has sought shade and shelter from the burning sun.

Never was the man of spirit subjected to *ennui* if his body was exposed to fatigue; never did the man healthy of body fail to find life light if he had something to engage his mind. D'Artagnan, riding fast, always thinking, alighted from his horse in Paris, fresh and tender in his muscles as the athlete preparing for the gymnasium. The king did not expect him so soon, and had just departed for the chase towards Meudon. D'Artagnan, instead of riding after the king, as he would formerly have done, took off his boots, had a bath, and waited till his Majesty should return dusty and tired. He occupied the interval of five hours in taking, as people say, the air of the house, and in arming himself against all ill-chances. He learned that the king during the last fortnight had been gloomy; that the queen-mother was ill and much depressed; that Monsieur the king's brother was exhibiting a devotional turn; that Madame had the vapours; and that M. de Guiche had gone to one of his estates. He learned that M. Colbert was radiant; that M. Fouquet consulted a fresh physician every day, who still did not cure him, and that his principal complaint was one which physicians do not usually cure unless they are political physicians. The king, D'Artagnan was told, behaved in the kindest manner to M. Fouquet, and did not allow him to be ever out of his sight; but the superintendent, touched to the heart, like one of those fine trees which a worm has punctured, was declining daily, in spite of the royal smile,—that sun of court trees.

D'Artagnan learned that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had become indispensable to the king; that the king, during his sporting excursions, if he did not take her with him, wrote to her frequently, no longer verses, but, what was still much worse, prose,—and that whole pages at a time. Thus, as the poetical Pleiad of the day said, the *first king in the world* was seen descending from his horse *with an ardour beyond compare*, and on the crown of his hat scrawling bombastic phrases, which M. de

Saint-Aignan, aide-de-camp in perpetuity, carried to La Vallière at the risk of foundering his horses. During this time deer and pheasants were left to the free enjoyments of their nature,—hunted so lazily that, it was said, the art of venery ran great risk of degenerating at the court of France. D'Artagnan then thought of the wishes of poor Raoul, of that desponding letter destined for a woman who passed her life in hoping; and as D'Artagnan was inclined to philosophise, he resolved to profit by the absence of the king to have a minute's talk with Mademoiselle de la Vallière. This was a very easy affair; while the king was hunting, Louise was walking with some other ladies in one of the galleries of the Palais-Royal, exactly where the captain of the musketeers had some guards to inspect. D'Artagnan did not doubt that if he could but open the conversation upon Raoul, Louise might give him grounds for writing a consolatory letter to the poor exile; and hope, or at least consolation for Raoul, in the state of heart in which he had left him, was the sun, was life, to two men who were very dear to our captain. He directed his course therefore to the spot where he knew he should find Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

D'Artagnan found La Vallière the centre of a circle. In her apparent solitude the king's favourite received like a queen—more perhaps than the queen—an homage of which Madame had been so proud when all the king's looks were directed to her, and commanded the looks of the courtiers. D'Artagnan, although no squire of dames, received nevertheless civilities and attentions from the ladies. He was polite, as a brave man always is; and his terrible reputation had gained him as much friendship among the men as admiration among the women. On seeing him enter, therefore, the maids of honour immediately accosted him; they opened the attack by questions. Where had he been? What had he been doing? Why had they not seen him as usual make his fine horse curvet in such beautiful style, to the delight and astonishment of the curious from the king's balcony?

He replied that he had just come from the land of oranges. This set all the ladies laughing. Those were times in which everybody travelled, but in which, notwithstanding, a journey of a hundred leagues was an undertaking resulting often in death. "'From the land of oranges'?" cried Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente,—"from Spain?"—"Eh, eh!" said the musketeer.—"From Malta?" said Montalais.—"*Ma foi!* you are coming very near, ladies."—"Is it an island?" asked La

Vallière.—"Mademoiselle," said D'Artagnan, "I will not give you the trouble of seeking any farther; I come from the country where M. de Beaufort is at this moment embarking for Algiers."

"Have you seen the army?" asked several warlike fair ones. —"As plainly as I see you," replied D'Artagnan.—"And the fleet?"—"Yes,—I saw everything."—"Have we any of us any friends there?" said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, coldly, but in a manner to attract attention to a question that was not without a calculated aim.—"Why," replied D'Artagnan, "yes; there were M. de la Guillotière, M. de Mouchy, M. de Bragelonne—"

La Vallière became pale. "M. de Bragelonne!" cried the perfidious Athenaïs. "Eh, what! is he gone to the wars,—he?" Montalais trod upon her toe, but in vain. "Do you know what my opinion is?" continued Athenaïs, pitiless, addressing D'Artagnan.—"No, Mademoiselle; but I should like very much to know it."—"My opinion is, then, that all the men who go to this war are desperate, desponding men, whom love has treated ill, and who go to try if they cannot find black women more kind than fair ones have been."

Some of the ladies laughed; La Vallière was evidently confused; Montalais coughed loud enough to waken the dead. "Mademoiselle," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you are in error when you speak of black women at Djidgelli. The women there are not black; it is true they are not white,—they are yellow."—"Yellow!" exclaimed the bevy of fair beauties.—"Eh, do not disparage them! I have never seen a finer colour to match with black eyes and a coral mouth."—"So much the better for M. de Bragelonne," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, with persistent malice; "he will make amends for his loss, poor fellow!"

A profound silence followed these words; and D'Artagnan had time to reflect that women, those mild doves, treat one another much more cruelly than tigers and bears. But making La Vallière pale did not satisfy Athenaïs; she determined to make her blush likewise. Resuming the conversation without pause, "Do you know, Louise," said she, "that that is a great sin on your conscience?"

"What sin, Mademoiselle?" stammered the unfortunate girl, looking round her for support, without finding it.—"Eh! why?" continued Athenaïs, "the poor young man was affianced to you; he loved you, you cast him off."—"Well, and that is a right every honest woman has," said Montalais, in an affected

tone. "When we know we cannot constitute the happiness of a man, it is much better to cast him off."

"Cast him off! refuse him!—that's all very well," said Athenaïs, "but that is not the sin with which Mademoiselle de la Vallière has to reproach herself. The actual sin is sending poor Bragelonne to the wars; and to wars in which death is to be met." Louise pressed her hand over her icy brow. "And if he dies," continued her pitiless tormentor; "you will have killed him. That is the sin."

Louise, half-dead, caught at the arm of the captain of the musketeers, whose face betrayed unusual emotion. "You wished to speak with me, M. d'Artagnan," said she, in a voice broken by anger and pain. "What had you to say to me?" D'Artagnan made several steps along the gallery, supporting Louise on his arm; then, when they were far enough removed from the others, "What I had to say to you, Mademoiselle," replied he, "Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente has just expressed; roughly and unkindly, it is true, but still in its entirety."

She uttered a faint cry; pierced to the heart by this new wound, she went on her way like one of those poor birds which, fatally injured, seek the shade of the thicket to die. She disappeared at one door at the moment the king was entering by another. The first glance of the king was directed towards the empty seat of his mistress. Not perceiving La Vallière, a frown came over his brow; but immediately he saw D'Artagnan, who saluted him. "Ah, Monsieur!" cried he, "you have been diligent! I am pleased with you." This was the superlative expression of royal satisfaction. Many men would have been ready to lay down their lives for such a speech from the king. The maids of honour and the courtiers, who had formed a respectful circle round the king on his entrance, drew back on observing that he wished to speak privately with his captain of the musketeers. The king led the way out of the gallery, after having again, with his eyes, sought everywhere for La Vallière, for whose absence he could not account. The moment they were out of the reach of curious ears, "Well! M. d'Artagnan," said he, "the prisoner?"—"Is in his prison, Sire."—"What did he say on the road?"—"Nothing, Sire."—"What did he do?"—"There was a moment at which the fisherman who took me in his boat to Ste. Marguerite revolted, and did his best to kill me. The—the prisoner defended me instead of attempting to fly."

Digitized by Google

The king became pale. "Enough!" said he; and D'Artagnan bowed. Louis walked about his cabinet with hasty steps. "Were you at Antibes," said he, "when M. de Beaufort came there?"—"No, Sire; I was setting off when Monsieur the Duke arrived."—"Ah!"—which was followed by a fresh silence. "Whom did you see there?"—"A great many persons," said D'Artagnan, coolly.

The king perceived that he was unwilling to speak. "I have sent for you, Monsieur the Captain, to desire you to go and prepare my lodgings at Nantes."—"At Nantes!" cried D'Artagnan.—"In Bretagne."—"Yes, Sire, it is in Bretagne. Will your Majesty make so long a journey as to Nantes?"—"The States are assembled there," replied the king. "I have two demands to make of them; I wish to be there."

"When shall I set out?" said the captain.—"This evening—to-morrow—to-morrow evening; for you must stand in need of rest."—"I have rested, Sire."—"That is well. Then between this and to-morrow evening, when you please."

D'Artagan bowed as if to take his leave; but perceiving that the king was very much embarrassed, "Will your Majesty," said he, stepping two paces forward, "take the court with you?"—"Certainly I shall."—"Then your Majesty will doubtless want the musketeers?" And the eye of the king sank beneath the penetrating glance of the captain. "Take a brigade of them," replied Louis.

"Is that all? Has your Majesty no other orders to give me?"—"No—ah—yes."—"I am all attention, Sire."—"At the Castle of Nantes, which I hear is very ill arranged, you will adopt the practice of placing musketeers at the door of each of the principal dignitaries I shall take with me."

"Of the principal?"—"Yes."—"For instance, at the door of M. de Lyonne?"—"Yes."—"At that of M. Letellier?"—"Yes."—"Of M. de Brienne?"—"Yes."—"And of Monsieur the Superintendent?"—"Without doubt."—"Very well, Sire. By to-morrow I shall have set out."

"Oh, one word more, M. d'Artagnan. At Nantes you will meet with M. le Duc de Gesvres, captain of the guards. Be sure that your musketeers are placed before his guards arrive. Precedence always belongs to the first comer."—"Yes, Sire."—"And if M. de Gesvres should question you?"—"Question me, Sire! Is it likely that M. de Gesvres would question me?" And the musketeer, turning cavalierly on his heel, disappeared.

Digitized by Google

"To Nantes!" said he to himself, as he descended the stairs. "Why did he not dare to say at once to Belle-Isle?"

As he reached the great gates, one of M. de Brienne's clerks came running after him, exclaiming, "M. d'Artagnan, I beg your pardon—"—"What is the matter, M. Ariste?"—"The king has desired me to give you this order."—"Upon your cash-box?" asked the musketeer.—"No, Monsieur; upon that of M. Fouquet."

D'Artagnan was surprised; but he took the order, which was in the king's own writing, and was for two hundred pistoles. "What!" thought he, after having politely thanked M. de Brienne's clerk, "M. Fouquet is to pay for the journey, then! *Mordioux!* that is a bit of pure Louis XI.! Why was not this order upon the chest of M. Colbert? He would have paid it with such joy." And D'Artagnan, faithful to his principle of never letting an order at sight get cold, went straight to the house of M. Fouquet, to receive his two hundred pistoles.

CHAPTER CCXLI

THE LAST SUPPER

THE superintendent had no doubt received notice of the approaching departure, for he was giving a farewell dinner to his friends. From the bottom to the top of the house, the hurry of the servants bearing dishes, and the diligence of the *registres*, denoted an approaching change in both offices and kitchen. D'Artagnan, with his order in his hand, presented himself at the offices, when he was told it was too late to pay cash,—the chest was closed. He only replied, "On the king's service."

The clerk, a little put out by the serious air of the captain, replied that that was a very respectable reason, but that the customs of the house were respectable likewise; and that in consequence he begged the bearer to call again next day. D'Artagnan asked if he could not see M. Fouquet. The clerk replied that Monsieur the Superintendent did not interfere with such details, and rudely closed the door in D'Artagnan's face. But the latter had foreseen this stroke, and placed his boot between the door and the doorcase, so that the lock did not catch, and the clerk was still face to face, with his interlocutor.

This made him change his tone, and say with terrified politeness, "If Monsieur wishes to speak to Monsieur the Superintendent, he must go to the antechamber; these are the offices where Monseigneur never comes."—"Oh, very well! Where are they?" replied the captain.—"On the other side of the court," said the clerk, delighted at being free.

D'Artagnan crossed the court, and fell in with a crowd of servants. "Monseigneur sees nobody at this hour," he was answered by a fellow carrying a vermeil dish, in which were three pheasants and twelve quails. "Tell him," said the captain, stopping the servant by laying hold of his dish, "that I am M. d'Artagnan, captain of his Majesty's musketeers."

The fellow uttered a cry of surprise and disappeared, D'Artagnan following him slowly. He arrived just in time to meet M. Pellisson in the antechamber; the latter, a little pale, came hastily out of the dining-room to learn what was the matter. D'Artagnan smiled. "There is nothing unpleasant, M. Pellisson; only a little order to receive some money."—"Ah!" said Fouquet's friend, breathing more freely; and he took the captain by the hand, and dragging him behind him, led him into the dining-room, where a number of friends surrounded the superintendent, placed in the centre, and buried in the cushions of an arm-chair. There were assembled all the Epicureans who so lately at Vaux did honour to the house, the intelligence, and the wealth of M. Fouquet. Joyous friends, for the most part faithful, they had not fled from their protector at the approach of the storm, and in spite of the threatening heavens, in spite of the trembling earth, they remained there, smiling, cheerful, as devoted to him in misfortune as they had been in prosperity. On the left of the superintendent was Madame de Bellière; on his right was Madame Fouquet; as if braving the laws of the world, and putting all vulgar reasons of propriety to silence, the two protecting angels of this man united to offer him at the moment of the crisis the support of their intertwined arms. Madame de Bellière was pale, trembling, and full of respectful attentions for Madame the wife of the superintendent, who, with one hand on the hand of her husband, was looking anxiously towards the door by which Pellisson had gone out to bring in D'Artagnan. The captain entered at first full of courtesy, and afterwards of admiration, when, with his infallible glance, he had interpreted the expression of every face.

Fouquet raised himself up in his chair. "Pardon me, M. d'Artagnan," said he, "if I did not come to receive you when

Digitized by Google

coming in the king's name." And he pronounced the last words with a sort of melancholy firmness, which filled the hearts of his friends with terror. "Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "I only come to you in the king's name to demand payment of an order for two hundred pistoles."

The clouds passed from every brow but that of Fouquet, which still remained overcast. "Ah, then," said he, "perhaps you also are going to Nantes?"—"I do not know whither I am going, Monseigneur."

"But," said Madame Fouquet, recovered from her fright, "you are not going so soon, Monsieur the Captain, but that you can do us the honour to take a seat with us?"—"Madame, I should esteem that a great honour done to me, but I am so pressed for time, that, you see, I have been obliged to permit myself to interrupt your repast to procure payment of my order."—"The reply to which shall be gold," said Fouquet, making a sign to his intendant, who went out with the order which D'Artagnan handed to him.—"Oh!" said the latter, "I was not uneasy about the payment; the house is good."

A painful smile passed over the pale features of Fouquet. "Are you in pain?" asked Madame de Bellière.—"Do you feel your attack coming on?" asked Madame Fouquet.—"Neither, thank you," said Fouquet.

"Your attack?" said D'Artagnan, in his turn; "are you unwell, Monseigneur?"—"I have a tertian fever, which seized me after the *fête* at Vaux."—"Caught cold in the grottos at night, perhaps?"—"No, no! nothing but agitation, that was all."—"The too much heart you displayed in your reception of the king," said La Fontaine, quietly, without suspicion that he was uttering a sacrilege.

"We cannot devote too much heart to the reception of our king," said Fouquet, mildly, to his poet.—"Monsieur meant to say the too great ardour," interrupted D'Artagnan, with perfect frankness and much amenity. "The fact is, Monseigneur, that hospitality was never practised as at Vaux."

Madame Fouquet permitted her countenance to show clearly that if Fouquet had conducted himself well towards the king, the king had not rendered the like to the minister. But D'Artagnan knew the terrible secret. He alone with Fouquet knew it; those two men had not, the one the courage to complain, the other the right to accuse. The captain, to whom the two hundred pistoles were brought, was about to take leave, when Fouquet, rising, took a glass of wine, and ordered one to be

given to D'Artagnan. "Monsieur," said he, "to the health of the king, *whatever may happen.*"

"And to your health, Monseigneur, 'whatever may happen,'" said D'Artagnan. He bowed, with these words of evil omen, to all the company, who rose as soon as they heard the sound of his spurs and boots at the bottom of the stairs.

"I for a moment thought it was I and not my money he wanted," said Fouquet, endeavouring to laugh.—"You!" cried his friends; "and what for, in the name of Heaven?"—"Oh, do not deceive yourselves, my dear brothers in Epicurus!" said the superintendent. "I will not make a comparison between the most humble sinner on the earth and the God we adore; but remember he gave one day to his friends a repast which is called the Last Supper, and which was only a farewell dinner, like that which we are making at this moment."

A painful cry of protestation arose from all parts of the table. "Shut the doors," said Fouquet, and the servants disappeared. "My friends," continued Fouquet, lowering his voice, "what was I formerly; what am I now? Consult among yourselves, and reply. A man like me sinks when he does not continue to rise. What shall we say, then, when he really sinks? I have no more money, no more credit; I have no longer anything but powerful enemies and powerless friends."

"Quick!" cried Pellisson, rising. "Since you explain yourself with that frankness, it is our duty to be frank likewise. Yes, you are ruined; yes, you are hastening to your ruin. Stop! And in the first place, what money have you left?"—"Seven hundred thousand livres," said the intendant.—"Bread," murmured Madame Fouquet.—"Relays," said Pellisson,—"relays, and fly!"—"Whither?"—"To Switzerland; to Savoy; but fly!"

"If Monseigneur flies," said Madame de Bellière, "it will be said that he was guilty, and was afraid."—"More than that, it will be said that I have carried away twenty millions with me."—"We will draw up memoirs to justify you," said La Fontaine. "Fly!"—"I will remain," said Fouquet; "and besides, does not everything serve me?"

"You have Belle-Isle," cried the Abbé Fouquet.—"And I am of course going thither when going to Nantes," replied the superintendent. "Patience, then!"—"Before arriving at Nantes, what a distance!" said Madame Fouquet.—"Yes, I know that well," replied Fouquet; "but what is to be done about it? The king summons me to the States; I know well

it is for the purpose of ruining me, but to refuse to go would show uneasiness."

"Well, I have discovered the means of reconciling everything," cried Pellisson. "You are going to set out for Nantes." Fouquet looked at him with an air of surprise. "But with friends,—in your own carriage as far as Orléans; in your barge as far as Nantes; always ready to defend yourself if you are attacked, to escape if you are threatened. In fact, you will carry your money, to be provided against all chances; and while flying you will only have obeyed the king; then, reaching the sea when you like, you will embark for Belle-Isle, and from Belle-Isle you will shoot out whenever it may please you, like the eagle, which rushes into space when it has been driven from its eyry."

A general assent followed Pellisson's words. "Yes, do so," said Madame Fouquet to her husband.—"Do so," said Madame de Bellière.—"Do it; do it!" cried all his friends.—"I will do so," replied Fouquet.—"This very evening?"—"In an hour?"—"Immediately."

"With seven hundred thousand livres you can lay the foundation of another fortune," said the Abbé Fouquet. "What is there to prevent our arming corsairs at Belle-Isle?"—"And if necessary, we will go and discover a new world," added La Fontaine, intoxicated with projects and enthusiasm.

A knock at the door interrupted this concert of joy and hope. "A courier from the king," said the master of the ceremonies. A profound silence immediately ensued, as if the message brought by this courier was a reply to all the projects given birth to an instant before. Every one waited to see what the master would do. His brow was streaming with perspiration, and he was really suffering from his fever at that instant. He passed into his cabinet to receive the king's message. There prevailed, as we have said, such a silence in the chambers and throughout the attendance, that from the dining-room could be heard the voice of Fouquet saying, "That is well, Monsieur." This voice was, however, broken by fatigue, trembling with emotion. An instant after, Fouquet called Gourville, who crossed the gallery amid the universal expectation. At length he himself reappeared among his guests, but it was no longer the same pale, spiritless countenance they had beheld when he left them; from pale he had become livid, and from spiritless, annihilated. A living spectre, he advanced with his arms stretched out, his mouth parched,—like a shade that comes to

salute friends of former days. On seeing him thus, every one cried out, and every one rushed towards Fouquet. The latter, looking at Pellisson, leaned upon his wife and pressed the icy hand of the Marquise de Bellière. "Well!" said he, in a voice that had nothing human in it.—"My God! what has happened?" said some one to him.

Fouquet opened his right hand, which was clinched, humid, and displayed a paper, upon which Pellisson cast a terrified glance. He read the following lines, written by the king's hand:—

"DEAR AND WELL-BELOVED M. FOUQUET,—Give us, upon that which you have left of ours, the sum of seven hundred thousand livres, of which we stand in need to prepare for our departure. And as we know that your health is not good, we pray God to restore you to health, and to have you in his holy keeping. LOUIS.

"The present letter is to serve as a receipt."

A murmur of terror circulated through the apartment. "Well," cried Pellisson, in his turn, "you have received that letter?"—"Received it,—yes!"—"What will you do, then?"—"Nothing, since I have received it."—"But—"—"If I have received it, Pellisson, I have paid it," said the superintendent with a simplicity that went to the heart of all present.

"You have paid it!" cried Madame Fouquet. "Then we are ruined!"—"Come, no useless words!" interrupted Pellisson. "After money, life, Monseigneur; to horse! to horse!"—"What! leave us?" at once cried both the women, wild with grief.—"Eh, Monseigneur, in saving yourself you save us all. To horse!"

"But he cannot hold himself on. Look at him!"—"Oh, if he takes time to reflect—" said the intrepid Pellisson.—"He is right," murmured Fouquet.

"Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" cried Gourville, rushing up the stairs four steps at once; "Monseigneur!"—"Well, what?"—"I escorted, as you desired, the king's courier with the money."—"Yes."—"Well; when I arrived at the Palais-Royal, I saw—"—"Take breath, my poor friend, take breath; you are suffocating."—"What did you see?" cried the impatient friends.—"I saw the musketeers mounting on horseback," said Gourville.

"There, then!" cried all voices at once; "there, then! is there an instant to be lost?" Madame Fouquet rushed down-

stairs, calling for her horses; Madame de Bellière flew after her catching her in her arms, and saying, "Madame, in the name of his safety, do not betray anything, do not manifest any alarm." Pellisson ran to have the horses put to the carriages; and in the meantime, Gourville gathered in his hat all that the weeping friends were able to throw into it of gold and silver,—the last offering, the pious alms made to misfortune by poverty. The superintendent, dragged along by some, carried by others, was shut up in his carriage. Gourville took the reins, and mounted the box. Pellisson supported Madame Fouquet, who had fainted. Madame de Bellière had more strength, and was well paid for it; she received Fouquet's last kiss. Pellisson easily explained this precipitate departure by saying that an order from the king had summoned the minister to Nantes.

CHAPTER CCXLII

IN THE CARRIAGE OF M. COLBERT

As Gourville had seen, the king's musketeers were mounting and following their captain. The latter, who did not like to be confined in his proceedings, left his brigade under the orders of a lieutenant, and set off upon post-horses, recommending his men to use all diligence. However rapidly they might travel, they could not arrive before him. He had time, in passing along the Rue des Petits-Champs, to see a thing which afforded him much food for thought. He saw M. Colbert coming out from his house to get into a carriage which was stationed before the door. In this carriage D'Artagnan perceived the hoods of two women, and being rather curious, he wished to know the names of the women concealed beneath these hoods. To get a glimpse at them, for they kept themselves closely covered up, he urged his horse so near to the carriage that he drove him against the step with such force as to give a shock to the entire equipage and those whom it contained. The terrified women uttered, the one a faint cry, by which D'Artagnan recognised a young woman, the other an imprecation, by which he recognised the vigour and self-possession which half a century bestows. The hoods were thrown back; one of the women was Madame Vanel, the other was the Duchesse de Chevreuse. D'Artagnan's eyes were quicker than those of the ladies; he had seen and known them,

Digitized by Google

while they did not recognise him. And as they laughed at their fright, pressing each other's hands, "Humph!" said D'Artagnan, "the old duchess is not more difficult in her friendships than she was formerly. She pays court to the mistress of M. Colbert! Poor M. Fouquet! that presages you nothing good!"

He rode on. M. Colbert got into his carriage, and this noble trio began a sufficiently slow pilgrimage towards the wood of Vincennes. Madame de Chevreuse set down Madame Vanel at her husband's house; and left alone with M. Colbert, she chatted upon affairs while continuing her ride. She had an inexhaustible fund of conversation, had that dear duchess, and as she always talked for the ill of others, always with a view to her own good, her conversation amused her interlocutor, and did not fail to make a favourable impression.

She taught Colbert, who, poor man, was ignorant of it, how great a minister he was, and how Fouquet would soon become nothing. She promised to rally around him, when he should become superintendent, all the old nobility of the kingdom, and questioned him as to the degree of importance it would be proper to assign to La Vallière. She praised him; she blamed him; she bewildered him. She showed him the inside of so many secrets that for a moment Colbert feared he must have to do with the Devil. She proved to him that she held in her hand the Colbert of to-day, as she had held the Fouquet of yesterday; and as he asked her, very simply, the reason of her hatred for the superintendent, "Why do you yourself hate him?" said she.—"Madame, in politics," replied he, "the differences of system may bring about divisions between men. M. Fouquet always appeared to me to practise a system opposed to the true interests of the king."

She interrupted him. "I will say no more to you about M. Fouquet. The journey the king is about to take to Nantes will give a good account of him. M. Fouquet, for me, is a man quite gone by,—and for you also." Colbert made no reply. "On his return from Nantes," continued the duchess, "the king, who is only anxious for a pretext, will find that the States have not behaved well,—that they have made too few sacrifices. The States will say that the imposts are too heavy, and that the superintendent has ruined them. The king will lay all the blame on M. Fouquet, and then—"—"And then?" said Colbert.

"Oh, he will be disgraced. Is not that your opinion?"

Digitized by Google

Colbert darted a glance at the duchess, which plainly said, "If M. Fouquet be only disgraced, you will not be the cause of it." —"Your place, M. Colbert," the duchess hastened to say, "should be very prominent. Do you perceive any one between the king and yourself after the fall of M. Fouquet?"—"I do not understand," said he.

"You will understand. To what does your ambition aspire?" —"I have none."—"It was useless then to overthrow the superintendent, M. Colbert. That is idle."—"I had the honour to tell you, Madame—"—"Oh, yes, I know, the interest of the king; but if you please we will speak of your own."

"Mine! that is to say, the affairs of his Majesty."—"In short, are you, or are you not ruining M. Fouquet? Answer without evasion."—"Madame, I ruin nobody."—"I cannot then comprehend why you should purchase of me the letters of M. Mazarin concerning M. Fouquet. Neither can I conceive why you have laid those letters before the king."

Colbert, half stupefied, looked at the duchess, and with an air of constraint, "Madame," said he, "I can less easily conceive how you, who received the money, can reproach me on that head."—"It is," said the old duchess, "because we must choose what we can have when we can't have what we choose." —"You have hit it," said Colbert, unhorsed by that plain speaking.

"You are not able, eh? Speak."—"I am not able, I allow, to destroy certain influences near the king."—"Which contend for M. Fouquet? What are they? Stop, let me help you."— "Do, Madame."—"La Vallière?"—"Oh! very little influence; no knowledge of affairs, and no resources. M. Fouquet has paid court to her."

"To defend him would be to accuse herself, would it not?" —"I think it would."—"There is still another influence; what do you say to that?"—"Is it considerable?"—"The queen-mother, perhaps?"—"Her Majesty the Queen-mother has for M. Fouquet a weakness very prejudicial to her son."—"Never believe that," said the old duchess, smiling.

"Oh!" said Colbert, with incredulity, "I have often experienced it."—"Formerly?"—"Very recently, Madame, at Vaux. It was she who prevented the king from having M. Fouquet arrested."—"People do not always entertain the same opinions, my dear monsieur. That which the queen may have wished recently, she would not perhaps to-day."—"And why not?" said Colbert, astonished.—"Oh, the reason is of very little

Digitized by Google

consequence."—"On the contrary, I think it is of great consequence,—for if I were certain of not displeasing her Majesty the Queen-mother, all my scruples would be removed."

"Well, have you never heard a certain secret spoken of?"—"A secret?"—"Call it what you like. In short, the queen-mother has conceived a horror for all those who have participated, in one fashion or another, in the discovery of this secret; and M. Fouquet I believe to be one of these."—"Then," said Colbert, "we may be sure of the assent of the queen-mother?"—"I have just left her Majesty, and she assures me so."—"So be it then, Madame."

"But there is something further: do you happen to know a man who was the intimate friend of M. Fouquet, M. d'Herblay, a bishop, I believe?"—"Bishop of Vannes."—"Well, this M. d'Herblay, who also knew the secret, the queen-mother is causing to be pursued with the utmost rancour."—"Indeed!"—"So hotly pursued, that if he were dead she would not be satisfied with anything less than his head, to satisfy her he would never speak again."

"And is that the desire of the queen-mother?"—"An order is given for it."—"This M. d'Herblay shall be sought for, Madame."

"Oh, it is well known where he is." Colbert looked at the duchess. "Say where, Madame."—"He is at Belle-Isle-en-Mer."—"At the residence of M. Fouquet?"—"At the residence of M. Fouquet."—"He shall be taken."

It was now the duchess's turn to smile. "Do not fancy that so easy," said she, "and do not promise it so lightly."—"Why not, Madame?"—"Because M. d'Herblay is not one of those people who can be taken just when you please."—"He is a rebel, then?"—"Oh, M. Colbert, we folks have passed all our lives in making rebels, and yet you see plainly that so far from being taken, we take others."

Colbert fixed upon the old duchess one of those fierce looks of which no words can convey the expression, accompanied by a firmness which was not wanting in grandeur. "The times are gone," said he, "in which subjects gained duchies by making war against the king of France. If M. d'Herblay conspires, he will perish on the scaffold. That will give, or will not give, pleasure to his enemies,—that is of very little importance to us." And this "us," a strange word in the mouth of Colbert, made the duchess thoughtful for a moment. She caught herself reckoning inwardly with this man. Colbert had regained his

superiority in the conversation, and he was desirous of keeping it.

"You ask me, Madame," he said, "to have this M. d'Herblay arrested?"—"I! I ask you nothing of the kind!"—"I thought you did, Madame. But as I have been mistaken, we will leave him alone; the king has said nothing about him." The duchess bit her nails.

"Besides," continued Colbert, "what a poor capture would this bishop be! A bishop game for a king! Oh, no, no; I will not even think of him." The hatred of the duchess now disclosed itself. "Game for a woman!" said she; "and the queen is a woman. If she wishes to have M. d'Herblay arrested, she has her reasons for it. Besides, is not M. d'Herblay the friend of him who is destined to fall?"

"Oh, never mind that," said Colbert. "This man shall be spared if he is not the enemy of the king. Is that displeasing to you?"—"I say nothing."—"Yes, you wish to see him in prison,—in the Bastille, for instance."—"I believe a secret better concealed behind the walls of the Bastille than behind those of Belle-Isle."

"I will speak to the king about it; he will clear up the point."—"And while waiting for that enlightenment M. l'Evêque de Vannes will have escaped. I would do so."—"Escaped! he! and whither would he escape? Europe is ours, in will, if not in fact."—"He will always find an asylum, Monsieur. It is evident you know nothing of the man you have to do with. You do not know D'Herblay; you did not know Aramis. He was one of those four musketeers who under the late king made Cardinal de Richelieu tremble, and who during the regency gave so much trouble to Monseigneur Mazarin."

"But, Madame, what can he do, unless he has a kingdom to back him?"—"He has one, Monsieur."—"A kingdom, he,—M. d'Herblay?"—"I repeat to you, Monsieur, that if he wants a kingdom, he either has it, or will have it."—"Well, as you are so earnest that this rebel should not escape, Madame, I promise you he shall not escape."—"Belle-Isle is fortified, M. Colbert, and fortified by him."

"If Belle-Isle were also defended by him, Belle-Isle is not impregnable; and if M. l'Evêque de Vannes is shut up in Belle-Isle, well, Madame, the place will be besieged, and he will be taken."—"You may be very certain, Monsieur, that the zeal which you display for the interests of the queen-mother will affect her Majesty warmly, and that you will be magnificently

Digitized by Google

rewarded for it; but what shall I tell her of your projects respecting this man?"—"That when once taken, he shall be shut up in a fortress from which her secret shall never escape."

"Very well, M. Colbert; and we may say, that, dating from this instant, we have formed a solid alliance, you and I, and that I am entirely at your service."—"It is I, Madame, who place myself at yours. This Chevalier d'Herblay is a kind of Spanish spy, is he not?"—"More than that."—"A secret ambassador?"—"Higher still."

"Stop; King Philip III. of Spain is a bigot. He is, perhaps, the confessor of Philip III."—"You must go much higher than that."—"*Mordieu!*" cried Colbert, who forgot himself so far as to swear in the presence of this great lady, of this old friend of the queen-mother,—of the Duchesse de Chevreuse in short. "He must then be the General of the Jesuits."—"I believe you have guessed at last," replied the duchess.

"Ah, then, Madame, this man will ruin us all if we do not ruin him; and we must make haste to do it too."—"That was my opinion, Monsieur, but I did not dare to give it to you."—"And it is fortunate for us that he has attacked the throne, and not us."

"But mark this well, M. Colbert. M. d'Herblay is never discouraged; and if he has missed one blow, he will be sure to make another,—he will begin again. If he has allowed an opportunity to escape of making a king for himself, sooner or later he will make another of whom, to a certainty, you will not be prime minister." Colbert knitted his brow with a menacing expression. "I feel assured that a prison will settle this affair for us, Madame, in a manner satisfactory for both."

The duchess smiled. "Oh, if you knew," said she, "how many times Aramis has got out of prison!"—"Oh!" replied Colbert, "we shall take care he shall not get out this time."—"But you have not attended to what I said to you just now. Do you remember that Aramis was one of the four invincibles whom Richelieu dreaded? And at that period the four musketeers were not in possession of that which they have now,—money and experience." Colbert bit his lips. "We will renounce the idea of the prison," said he, in a lower tone; "we will find a retreat from which the invincible will not possibly escape."

"That is well spoken, our ally!" replied the duchess. "But it is getting late. Had we not better return?"—"The more willingly, Madame, from my having my preparations to make

for setting out with the king."—"To Paris!" cried the duchess to the coachman. And the carriage returned towards the Faubourg St. Antoine, after the conclusion of the treaty which gave up to death the last friend of Fouquet, the last defender of Belle-Isle, the ancient friend of Marie Michon, the new enemy of the duchess.

CHAPTER CCXLIII

THE TWO LIGHTERS

D'ARTAGNAN had set off; Fouquet likewise was gone, and he with a rapidity which the tender interest of his friends increased. The first moments of this journey, or better to say, of this flight, were troubled by the incessant fear of all the horses and all the carriages which could be perceived behind the fugitive. It was not natural, in fact, if Louis XIV. was determined to seize this prey, that he should allow it to escape; the young lion was already accustomed to the chase, and he had bloodhounds ardent enough to be depended on. But insensibly all fears were dispersed; the superintendent, by hard travelling, placed such a distance between himself and his persecutors that no one of them could reasonably be expected to overtake him. As to his position, his friends had made it excellent for him. Was he not travelling to join the king at Nantes, and what did the rapidity prove but his zeal to obey? He arrived, fatigued but reassured, at Orléans, where he found, thanks to the care of a courier, who had preceded him, a handsome lighter of eight oars.

These lighters, in the shape of gondolas, rather wide and rather heavy, containing a small cuddy, covered by the deck, and a chamber in the poop, formed by a tent, then acted as passage-boats from Orléans to Nantes, by the Loire; and this passage, a long one in our days, appeared then more easy and convenient than the high-road, with its post-hacks or its bad, insecurely-hung carriages. Fouquet went on board this lighter, which set out immediately. The rowers, knowing they had the honour of conveying the superintendent of the finances, pulled with all their strength, and that magic phrase, "the finances," promised them a liberal gratification, of which they wished to prove themselves worthy.

The lighter bounded over the waters of the Loire. Magni-

Digitized by Google

ficent weather, one of those sun-risings that empurple landscapes, left the river all its limpid serenity. The current and the rowers carried Fouquet along as wings carry a bird, and he arrived before Beaugency without any accident upon the way. Fouquet hoped to be the first to arrive at Nantes; there he would see the notables and gain support among the principal members of the States; he would make himself necessary,—a thing very easy for a man of his merit,—and would delay the catastrophe, if he did not succeed in avoiding it entirely. "Besides," said Gourville to him, "at Nantes, you will make out, or we will make out, the intentions of your enemies; we will have horses always ready to convey you to the inextricable Poitou, and a boat in which to gain the sea; and when once in the open sea, Belle-Isle is the inviolable port. You see, besides, that no one is watching you, no one is following you."

He had scarcely finished when they discovered at a distance, behind an elbow formed by the river, the masts of a large lighter, which was coming down. The rowers of Fouquet's boat uttered a cry of surprise on seeing this galley. "What is the matter?" asked Fouquet.—"The matter is, Monseigneur," replied the skipper of the boat, "that it is a truly remarkable thing,—that lighter comes along like a hurricane."

Gourville started and mounted on the deck, in order to see the better. Fouquet did not go up with him; but he said to Gourville with a restrained mistrust, "See what it is, dear friend." The lighter had just passed the elbow. It came on so fast that behind it might be seen to tremble the white train of its wake illumined with the fires of day.

"How they go!" repeated the skipper,—"how they go! They must be well paid! I did not think," he added, "that oars of wood could behave better than ours, but those yonder prove the contrary."—"Well, they may," said one of the rowers; "they are twelve, and we are but eight."—"Twelve rowers!" replied Gourville, "twelve! impossible!"

The number of eight rowers for a lighter had never been exceeded, even for the king. This honour had been paid to Monsieur the Superintendent, even more for the sake of haste than of respect. "What does that mean?" said Gourville, endeavouring to distinguish beneath the tent, which was already apparent, the travellers, whom the most piercing eye could not yet have succeeded in discovering. "They must be in a hurry, for it is not the king," said the skipper. Fouquet shuddered.

"By what do you know that it is not the king?" said Gour-

ville.—" In the first place because there is no white flag with *fleurs-de-lis*, which the royal lighter always carries."—" And then," said Fouquet, " because it is impossible it should be the king, Gourville, as the king was still in Paris yesterday." Gourville replied to the superintendent by a look which said, " You were there yourself yesterday."

" And by what do you make out they are in such haste? " added he, for the sake of gaining time.—" By this, Monsieur," said the skipper: " these people must have set out a long while after us, and they have already nearly overtaken us."—" Bah! " said Gourville, " who told you that they do not come from Beaugency or from Niort even? "—" We have seen no lighter of that force, except at Orléans. It comes from Orléans, Monsieur, and makes great haste."

Fouquet and Gourville exchanged a glance. The skipper remarked their uneasiness, and to mislead him, Gourville immediately said, " It is some friend, who has laid a wager he would catch us; let us win the wager, and not allow him to come up with us."

The skipper opened his mouth to reply that that was impossible, when Fouquet said with much hauteur, " If it is any one who wishes to overtake us, let him come."—" We can try, Monseigneur," said the skipper, timidly. " Come, you fellows, put out your strength; row, row! "—" No," said Fouquet, " stop short, on the contrary."

" Monseigneur! what folly! " interrupted Gourville, stooping towards his ear.—" Quite short! " repeated Fouquet. The eight oars stopped, and resisting the water, they imparted a retrograde force to the lighter. It was stopped. The twelve rowers in the other did not at first perceive this manœuvre, for they continued to urge on their boat so vigorously that it arrived quickly within musket-shot. Fouquet was short-sighted; Gourville was annoyed by the sun, which was full in his eyes; the skipper alone, with that habit and clearness which are acquired by a constant struggle with the elements, perceived distinctly the travellers in the neighbouring lighter. " I can see them! " cried he; " there are two."—" I can see nothing," said Gourville.—" It will not be long before you distinguish them; by a few strokes of their oars they will arrive within twenty paces of us."

But what the skipper predicted was not fulfilled; the lighter imitated the movement commanded by Fouquet, and instead of coming to join its pretended friends, it stopped short in the

middle of the river. "I cannot comprehend this," said the skipper.—"Nor I," said Gourville.

"You who can see so plainly the people in that lighter," resumed Fouquet, "try to describe them to us, Skipper, before we are too far off."—"I thought I saw two," replied the boatman; "I can only see one now under the tent."—"What sort of man is he?"—"He is a dark man, large-shouldered, short-necked."

A little cloud at that moment passed across the azure of the heavens, and darkened the sun. Gourville, who was still looking with one hand over his eyes, became able to see what he sought, and all at once, jumping from the deck into the chamber where Fouquet awaited him, "Colbert!" said he, in a voice broken by emotion.

"Colbert!" repeated Fouquet; "oh, that is strange! but no, it is impossible!"—"I tell you I recognised him, and he at the same time so plainly recognised me that he has just gone into the chamber of the poop. Perhaps the king has sent him to make us come back."—"In that case he would join us instead of lying by. What is he doing there?"—"He is watching us, without doubt."

"I do not like uncertainty," said Fouquet; "let us go straight up to him."—"Oh, Monseigneur, do not do that,—the lighter is full of armed men."—"He would arrest me, then, Gourville?" Why does he not come on?"—"Monseigneur, it is not consistent with your dignity to go to meet even your ruin."—"But to allow them to watch me like a malefactor!"—"Nothing tells us that they are watching you, Monseigneur; be patient!"

"What is to be done, then?"—"Do not stop; you were only going so fast to appear to obey the king's order with zeal. Redouble the speed. He who lives will see."—"That's just. Come!" cried Fouquet; "since they remain stockstill yonder, let us go on."

The skipper gave the signal, and Fouquet's rowers resumed their task with all the success that could be looked for from men who had rested. Scarcely had the lighter made a hundred fathoms, when the other—that with the twelve rowers—resumed its course as well. This position lasted all the day, without any increase or diminution of distance between the two vessels. Towards evening Fouquet wished to try the intentions of his persecutor. He ordered his rowers to pull towards the shore as if to effect a landing. Colbert's lighter imitated this manœuvre, and steered towards the shore in a

Digitized by Google

slanting direction. By the greatest chance, at the spot where Fouquet pretended to wish to land, a stableman from the Château de Langeais was following the flowery banks leading three horses in halters. Without doubt the people of the twelve-oared lighter fancied that Fouquet was directing his course towards horses prepared for his flight, for four or five men, armed with muskets, jumped from the lighter on to the shore, and marched along the banks, as if to gain ground on the horses and horseman. Fouquet, satisfied of having forced the enemy to a demonstration, was content, and put his boat in motion again. Colbert's people returned likewise to theirs, and the course of the two vessels was resumed with fresh perseverance. Upon seeing this, Fouquet felt himself threatened closely, and "Well, Gourville," said he, in a low voice, "what did I say at our last repast at my house? Am I going, or not, to my ruin?"

"Oh, Monseigneur!"—"These two boats, which contend with so much emulation, as if we were disputing, M. Colbert and I, a prize for swiftness on the Loire, do they not aptly represent our two fortunes; and do you not believe, Gourville, that one of the two will be wrecked at Nantes?"—"At least," objected Gourville, "there is still uncertainty. You are about to appear at the States; you are about to show what sort of man you are; your eloquence and your genius for business are the buckler and sword that will serve for defence, if not for victory. The Bretons do not know you; and when they shall know you your cause is won! Oh! let M. Colbert look to it well, for his lighter is as much exposed as yours to being upset. Both go quickly, his faster than yours, it is true; we shall see which will be wrecked first."

Fouquet, taking Gourville's hand, "My friend," said he, "it is all planned; remember the proverb, 'First come, first served!' Well, Colbert takes care not to pass me. He is a prudent man, Colbert!"

He was right; the two lighters held their course as far as Nantes, watching each other. When the superintendent landed, Gourville hoped he would be able to seek refuge at once and have relays prepared. But at the landing, the second lighter joined the first, and Colbert, approaching Fouquet, saluted him on the quay with marks of the profoundest respect, —marks so significant, so public, that their result was the bringing of the whole population upon La Fosse. Fouquet was completely self-possessed; he felt that in his last moments

of greatness he had obligations towards himself. He wished to fall from such a height that his fall should crush some one of his enemies. Colbert was there,—so much the worse for Colbert. The superintendent, therefore, coming up to him, replied with that arrogant winking of the eyes peculiar to him, "What! is that you, M. Colbert?"—"To offer you my respects, Monseigneur," said the latter.

"Were you in that lighter?" pointing to the one with twelve rowers.—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"Of twelve rowers?" said Fouquet; "what luxury, M. Colbert! For a moment I thought it was the queen-mother or the king."—"Monseigneur!" and Colbert blushed.

"This is a voyage that will cost those who have to pay for it dear, Monsieur the Intendant!" said Fouquet. "But you have, happily, arrived! You see, however," added he, a moment after, "that I, who had but eight rowers, arrived before you." And he turned his back towards him, leaving him uncertain whether all the tergiversations of the second lighter had escaped the notice of the first. At least he did not give him the satisfaction of showing that he had been frightened. Colbert, so annoyingly attacked, did not give way.

"I have not been quick, Monseigneur," he replied, "because I followed your own example whenever you stopped."—"And why did you do that, M. Colbert?" cried Fouquet, irritated by this base audacity; "as you had a superior crew to mine, why did you not either join me or pass me?"—"Out of respect," said the intendant, bowing to the ground.

Fouquet got into a carriage which the city sent to him, we know not why or how, and he repaired to the Maison de Nantes, escorted by a vast crowd of people, who for several days had been boiling with the expectation of a convocation of the States. Scarcely was he installed when Gourville went out to order horses upon the route to Poitiers and Vannes, and a boat at Paimbœuf. He performed these various operations with so much mystery, activity, and generosity that never was Fouquet, then labouring under an access of fever, more near being saved, except for the co-operation of that immense disturber of human projects,—chance.

A report was spread during the night that the king was coming in great haste upon post-horses, and that he would arrive within ten or twelve hours at latest. The people, while waiting for the king, were greatly rejoiced to see the musketeers, just arrived with M. d'Artagnan, their captain, and quartered

in the castle, of which they occupied all the posts, in quality of guard of honour. M. d'Artagnan, who was very polite, presented himself about ten o'clock at the lodgings of the superintendent, to pay his respectful compliments to him; and although the minister suffered from fever, although he was in such pain as to be bathed in sweat, he would receive M. d'Artagnan, who was delighted with that honour, as will be apparent in the conversation they had together.

CHAPTER CCXLIV

FRIENDLY ADVICE

FOUQUET had gone to bed, like a man who clings to life, and who economises as much as possible that slender tissue of existence of which the shocks and angles of this world so quickly wear out the irreparable tenuity. D'Artagnan appeared at the door of the chamber, and was saluted by the superintendent with a very affable "Good-day."

"Good-day, Monseigneur," replied the musketeer; "how did you get through the journey?"—"Tolerably well, thank you."—"And the fever?"—"But sadly. I drink as you see. I am scarcely arrived, and I have already levied a contribution of tisane upon Nantes."—"You should sleep first, Monseigneur."—"Eh, *corbleu!* my dear M. d'Artagnan, I should be very glad to sleep."

"Who hinders you?"—"Why, you, in the first place."—"I? Ah, Monseigneur!"—"No doubt you do. Is it at Nantes as it was at Paris; do you not come in the king's name?"—"For Heaven's sake, Monseigneur," replied the captain, "leave the king alone! The day on which I shall come on the part of the king for the purpose you mean, take my word for it, I will not leave you long in doubt. You will see me place my hand on my sword, according to the *ordonnance*, and you will hear me say at once in my ceremonial voice, 'Monseigneur, in the name of the king, I arrest you!'"

Fouquet trembled in spite of himself, the tone of the lively Gascon had been so natural and so vigorous. The representation of the fact was almost as frightful as the fact itself would be. "You promise me that frankness?" said Fouquet—"Upon my honour! But we are not come to that, believe me."

Digitized by Google

"What makes you think that, M. d'Artagnan? For my part, I think quite the contrary."—"I have heard of nothing of the kind," replied D'Artagnan.—"Eh, eh!" said Fouquet.—"Indeed, no. You are an agreeable man, in spite of your fever. The king ought not, cannot help loving you, at the bottom of his heart."

Fouquet's face implied doubt. "But M. Colbert?" said he; "does M. Colbert also love me as much as you say?"—"I don't speak of M. Colbert," replied D'Artagnan. "He is an exceptional man, is that M. Colbert. He does not love you,—that is very possible; but, *mordioux!* the squirrel can guard himself against the adder with very little trouble."

"Do you know that you are speaking to me quite as a friend?" replied Fouquet; "and that, upon my life! I have never met with a man of your intelligence and your heart?"—"You are pleased to say so," replied D'Artagnan. "Why did you wait till to-day to pay me such a compliment?"—"How blind we are!" murmured Fouquet.

"Your voice is getting hoarse," said D'Artagnan; "drink, Monseigneur, drink!" And he offered him a cup of tisane with the most friendly cordiality; Fouquet took it, and thanked him by a bland smile. "Such things happen only to me," said the musketeer. "I have passed ten years under your very beard, while you were rolling about tons of gold. You were clearing an annual income of four millions; you never observed me; and you find out there is such a person in the world just at the moment—"

"I am about to fall," interrupted Fouquet. "That is true, my dear M. d'Artagnan."—"I did not say so."—"But you thought so; and that is the same thing. Well, if I fall, take my word as truth, I shall not pass a single day without saying to myself, as I strike my brow, 'Fool! fool!—stupid mortal! You had a M. d'Artagnan under your eye and hand, and you did not employ him, you did not enrich him!'"

"You quite overwhelm me," said the captain. "I esteem you greatly."—"There exists another man, then, who does not think as M. Colbert does," said the superintendent.

"How this M. Colbert sticks in your stomach! He is worse than your fever!"—"Oh, I have good cause," said Fouquet. "Judge for yourself;" and he related the details of the course of the lighters, and the hypocritical persecution of Colbert. "Is not this a clear sign of my ruin?" D'Artagnan became serious. "That is true," said he. "Yes; that has a bad

odour, as M. de Tréville used to say." And he fixed upon M. Fouquet his intelligent and significant look.

"Am I not clearly aimed at in that, Captain? Is not the king bringing me to Nantes to get me away from Paris, where I have so many supporters, and to possess himself of Belle-Isle?"—"Where M. d'Herblay is," added D'Artagnan. Fouquet raised his head. "As for me, Monseigneur," continued D'Artagnan, "I can assure you the king has said nothing to me against you."—"Indeed!"

"The king commanded me to set out for Nantes, it is true, and to say nothing about it to M. de Gesvres."—"My friend."—"To M. de Gesvres, yes, Monseigneur," continued the musketeer, whose eyes did not cease to speak a language different from the language of his lips. "The king, moreover, commanded me to take a brigade of musketeers, which is apparently superfluous, as the country is quite quiet."—"A brigade," said Fouquet, raising himself upon his elbow.—"Ninety-six horsemen, yes, Monseigneur. The same number as were employed in arresting Messieurs de Chalais, de Cinq-Mars, and Montmorency."

Fouquet pricked up his ears at these words, pronounced without apparent value. "And besides?" said he.—"Well! nothing but insignificant orders,—such as guarding the castle, guarding every lodging, allowing none of M. de Gesvres's guards to occupy a single post,—M. de Gesvres, your friend."—"And for myself," cried Fouquet, "what orders had you?"—"For you, Monseigneur? Not the smallest word."

"M. d'Artagnan, the safety of my honour, and perhaps of my life, is at stake. You would not deceive me?"—"I? to what end? Are you threatened? Only there really is an order with respect to carriages and boats—"

"'An order?'"—"Yes; but it cannot concern you,—a simple measure of police."—"What is it, Captain,—what is it?"—"To forbid all horses or boats to leave Nantes without a pass signed by the king."—"Great God! but—" D'Artagnan began to laugh. "All that is not to be put into execution before the arrival of the king at Nantes. So that you see plainly, Monseigneur, the order in no wise concerns you."

Fouquet became thoughtful, and D'Artagnan, feigned not to observe his preoccupation, and said, "It is evident from my thus confiding to you the orders which have been given to me that I am friendly towards you, and that I endeavour to prove to you that none of them are directed against you."—

"Without doubt! without doubt!" said Fouquet, still absent-minded.

"Let us recapitulate," said the captain, his glance beaming with earnestness. "A special and severe guard of the castle, in which your lodging is to be, is it not? Do you know that castle? Ah, Monseigneur, a true prison! The total absence of M. de Gesvres, who has the honour of being one of your friends; the closing of the gates of the city, and of the river without a pass, but only when the king shall have arrived. Please to observe, M. Fouquet, that if, instead of speaking to a man like you, who are one of the first in the kingdom, I were speaking to a troubled, uneasy conscience, I should compromise myself for ever! What a fine opportunity for any one who wished to be free! No police, no guards, no orders; the water free, the roads free, M. d'Artagnan obliged to lend his horses, if required! All this ought to reassure you, M. Fouquet, for the king would not have left me thus independent if he had had any evil designs. In truth, M. Fouquet, ask me whatever you like, I am at your service; and in return, if you will consent to it, render me a service,—that of offering my compliments to Aramis and Porthos, in case you embark for Belle-Isle, as you have a right to do, without changing your dress, immediately, in your *robe de chambre*,—just as you are."

Having said these words, with a profound bow the musketeer, whose looks had lost none of their intelligent kindness, left the apartment. He had not reached the steps of the vestibule when Fouquet, quite beside himself, hung to the bell-rope, and shouted, "My horses! my lighter!" But nobody answered. The superintendent dressed himself with everything that came to hand. "Gourville! Gourville!" cried he, while slipping his watch into his pocket; and the bell sounded again, while Fouquet repeated, "Gourville! Gourville!"

Gourville at length appeared, breathless and pale. "Let us be gone! let us be gone!" cried the superintendent, as soon as he saw him.—"It is too late!" said the friend of poor Fouquet.—"Too late! why?"—"Listen!" And they heard the sounds of trumpets and drums in front of the castle. "What does that mean, Gourville?"—"It is the king coming, Monseigneur."

"The king!"—"The king, who has ridden double stages, who has killed horses, and who is eight hours in advance of your calculation."—"We are lost!" murmured Fouquet. "Brave D'Artagnan, all is over; thou hast spoken to me too late!"

The king, in fact, was entering the city, which soon resounded with the cannon from the ramparts, and from a vessel which replied from the lower parts of the river. Fouquet's brow darkened; he called his *valets de chambre*, and dressed in ceremonial costume. From his window, behind the curtains, he could see the eagerness of the people and the movement of a large troop, which had followed the prince. The king was conducted to the castle with great pomp, and Fouquet saw him dismount under the portcullis, and speak something in the ear of D'Artagnan, who held his stirrup. D'Artagnan, when the king had passed under the arch, directed his steps towards the house Fouquet was in; but so slowly, and stopping so frequently to speak to his musketeers, drawn up as a hedge, that it might be said he was counting the seconds or the steps before accomplishing his message. Fouquet opened the window to speak to him in the court.

"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan, on perceiving him, "are you still there, Monseigneur?" And that word "still" completed the proof to Fouquet of how much information, and how many useful counsels were contained in the first visit the musketeer had paid him. The superintendent sighed deeply. "Good heavens! yes, Monsieur," replied he. "The arrival of the king has interrupted me in the projects I had formed."

"Oh! then you know that the king is arrived?"—"Yes, Monsieur, I have seen him; and this time you come from him—"—"To inquire after you, Monseigneur; and if your health is not too bad, to beg you to have the kindness to repair to the castle."—"Directly, M. d'Artagnan, directly!"

"Ah, damn it!" said the captain; "now the king is come, there is no more walking for anybody,—no more free-will; the password governs all now, you as well as me, me as well as you." Fouquet heaved a last sigh, got into his carriage, so great was his weakness, and went to the castle, escorted by D'Artagnan, whose politeness was not less terrifying now than it had but just before been consoling and cheerful.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXLV

HOW THE KING, LOUIS XIV., PLAYED HIS LITTLE PART

As Fouquet was alighting from his carriage to enter the Castle of Nantes, a man of mean appearance went up to him with marks of the greatest respect, and gave him a letter. D'Artagnan endeavoured to prevent this man from speaking to Fouquet, and pushed him away; but the message had been given to the superintendent. Fouquet opened the letter and read it, and instantly a vague terror, which D'Artagnan did not fail to penetrate, was expressed by the countenance of the first minister. He put the paper into the portfolio which he had under his arm, and pressed on towards the king's apartments. D'Artagnan, as he went up behind Fouquet, through the small windows made at every landing of the donjon stairs, saw the man who had delivered the note look around him on the place, and make signs to several persons, who disappeared into the adjacent streets, after having themselves repeated the signals made by the person we have named. Fouquet was made to wait for a moment upon the terrace of which we have spoken,—a terrace which abutted on the little corridor, at the end of which the cabinet of the king was located. Here D'Artagnan passed on before the superintendent, whom till that time he had respectfully accompanied, and entered the royal cabinet. "Well?" asked Louis XIV., who, on perceiving him, threw on the table covered with papers a large green cloth.—"The order is executed, Sire."—"And Fouquet?"—"Monsieur the Superintendent follows me," replied D'Artagnan.—"In ten minutes let him be introduced," said the king, dismissing D'Artagnan with a gesture. The latter retired, but had scarcely reached the corridor at the extremity of which Fouquet was waiting for him, when he was recalled by the king's bell.

"Did he not appear astonished?" asked the king.—"Who, Sire?"—"Fouquet," repeated the king, without saying "Monsieur," a trifle which confirmed the captain of the musketeers in his suspicions.—"No, Sire," replied he.—"That's well!" and a second time Louis dismissed D'Artagnan.

Fouquet had not quitted the terrace where he had been left by his guide. He reperused his note, conceived thus:

"Something is being contrived against you. Perhaps they will not dare to carry it out at the castle; it will be on your return home. The house is already surrounded by musketeers. Do not enter. A white horse is in waiting for you behind the esplanade!"

Fouquet recognised the writing and the zeal of Gourville. Not being willing that if any evil happened to himself this paper should compromise a faithful friend, the superintendent was busy tearing it into a thousand morsels, spread about by the wind from the balustrade of the terrace. D'Artagnan found him watching the flight of the last scraps into space.—"Monsieur," said he, "the king waits for you."

Fouquet walked with a deliberate step into the little corridor, where Messieurs de Brienne and Rose were at work, while the Duc de Saint-Aignan, seated on a chair, likewise in the corridor, appeared to be waiting for orders with feverish impatience, his sword between his legs. It appeared strange to Fouquet that Messieurs de Brienne, Rose, and de Saint-Aignan, in general so attentive and obsequious, should scarcely take the least notice as he, the superintendent, passed. But how could he expect to find it otherwise among courtiers, he whom the king now called "Fouquet"? He raised his head, determined to meet with brave front whatever might happen, and entered the king's apartment, where a little bell, which we already know, had announced him to his Majesty.

The king, without rising, nodded to him, and with interest, "Well, how are you, M. Fouquet?" said he.—"I am in a high fever," replied the superintendent; "but I am at the king's service."—"That is well; the States assemble to-morrow. Have you a speech ready?"

Fouquet looked at the king with astonishment. "I have not, Sire," replied he; "but I will improvise one. I am too well acquainted with affairs to feel any embarrassment. I have only one question to ask; will your Majesty permit me?"—"Certainly; ask it."—"Why has your Majesty not done his first minister the honour to give him notice of this in Paris?"

"You were ill; I was not willing to fatigue you."—"Never did a labour, never did an explanation, fatigue me, Sire; and since the moment is come for me to demand an explanation of my king—"—"Oh, M. Fouquet, an explanation upon what?"—"Upon your Majesty's intentions with respect to myself."

The king blushed. "I have been calumniated," continued

Fouquet, warmly; "and I feel called upon to incite the justice of the king to make inquiries."—"You say this to me very uselessly, M. Fouquet; I know what I know."—"Your Majesty can only know things as they have been told to you; and I, on my part, have said nothing to you, while others have spoken many and many times—"

"What do you wish to say?" said the king, impatient to put an end to this embarrassing conversation.—"I will go straight to the fact, Sire; and I accuse a man of having injured me in your Majesty's opinion."—"Nobody has injured you, M. Fouquet."—"That reply proves to me, Sire, that I am right."

"M. Fouquet, I do not like that one should accuse."—"Not when one is accused?"—"We have already spoken too much about this affair."—"Your Majesty will not allow me to justify myself?"—"I repeat that I do not accuse you."

Fouquet, with a half-bow, made a step backwards. "It is certain," thought he, "that he has made up his mind; he alone who cannot go back can show such obstinacy. Not to see the danger now would be to be blind indeed; not to shun it would be stupid." He resumed aloud, "Did your Majesty send for me for any business?"—"No, M. Fouquet, but for some advice I have to give you."—"I respectfully await it, Sire."—"Rest yourself, M. Fouquet; do not throw away your strength. The session of the States will be short; and when my secretaries shall have closed it, I do not wish business to be talked of in France for a fortnight."

"Has the king nothing to say to me on the subject of this assembly of the States?"—"No, M. Fouquet."—"Not to me, the Superintendent of the Finances?"—"Rest yourself, I beg you; that is all I have to say to you."

Fouquet bit his lips and hung down his head. He was evidently busy with some uneasy thought. This uneasiness struck the king. "Are you troubled at having to rest yourself, M. Fouquet?" said he.—"Yes, Sire; I am not accustomed to take rest."—"But you are ill; you must take care of yourself."—"Your Majesty spoke just now of a speech to be pronounced to-morrow."

His Majesty made no reply; this unexpected stroke embarrassed him. Fouquet felt the weight of this hesitation. He thought he could read a danger in the eyes of the young king which his fear would precipitate. "If I appear frightened, I am lost," thought he.

The king, on his part, was only uneasy at the alarm of

Digitized by Google

Fouquet. "Has he a suspicion of anything?" murmured he.—"If his first word is severe," again thought Fouquet,—"if he becomes angry, or feigns to be angry, for the sake of a pretext,—how shall I extricate myself? Let us smooth the declivity a little. Gourville was right." "Sire," said he, suddenly, "since the goodness of the king watches over my health to the point of dispensing with my labour, may I not be allowed to be absent from the council of to-morrow? I could pass the day in bed, and will entreat the king to grant me his physician, that we may endeavour to find a remedy against this cursed fever."

"So be it, M. Fouquet, as you desire; you shall have a holiday to-morrow, you shall have the physician, and shall be restored to health."—"Thanks," said Fouquet, bowing. Then, opening his game, "Shall I not have the happiness of conducting your Majesty to my residence of Belle-Isle?" And he looked Louis full in the face to judge of the effect of such a proposal.

The king blushed again, "Do you know," replied he, endeavouring to smile, "that you have just said, 'My residence of Belle-Isle'?"—"Yes, Sire."—"Well, do you not remember," continued the king, in the same cheerful tone, "that you gave me Belle-Isle?"—"That is true again, Sire; only, as you have not taken it, you will come with me and take possession of it."—"I mean to do so."

"That was, then, your Majesty's intention as well as mine; and I cannot express to your Majesty how happy and proud I have been at seeing all the king's military household come from Paris for this taking possession." The king stammered out that he did not bring the musketeers for that alone. "Oh, I am convinced of that!" said Fouquet, warmly; "your Majesty knows very well that you have nothing to do but to come alone with a cane in your hand to bring to the ground all the fortifications of Belle-Isle."

"*Peste!*" cried the king; "I do not wish that those fine fortifications, whose erection cost so much, should fall at all. No,—let them stand against the Dutch and the English. You would not guess what I want to see at Belle-Isle, M. Fouquet; it is the pretty peasants and women of the lands on the seashore, who dance so well and are so seducing with their scarlet petticoats! I have heard great boast of your vassals, Monsieur the Superintendent; well, let me have a sight of them."—"Whenever your Majesty pleases."—"Have you any means of transport? It shall be to-morrow, if you like."

The superintendent felt this stroke, which was not adroit,

Digitized by Google

and replied, "No, Sire; I was ignorant of your Majesty's wish. Above all, I was ignorant of your haste to see Belle-Isle; and I am prepared with nothing."—"You have a boat of your own, nevertheless?"—"I have five; but they are all in the port or at Paimbœuf, and to join them or bring them hither we should require at least twenty-four hours. Have I any occasion to send a courier? Must I do so?"—"Wait a little; put an end to the fever,—wait till to-morrow."—"That is true; who knows but that by to-morrow we may not have a hundred other ideas?" replied Fouquet, now perfectly convinced and very pale.

The king started and stretched his hand out towards his little bell, but Fouquet prevented his ringing. "Sire," said he, "I have an ague,—I am trembling with cold. If I remain a moment longer, I shall most likely faint. I request your Majesty's permission to go and conceal myself beneath the bedclothes."—"Indeed, you are all in a shiver; it is painful to behold! Go, M. Fouquet, go. I will send to inquire after you."—"Your Majesty overwhelms me with kindness. In an hour I shall be better."—"I will call some one to reconduct you," said the king.—"As you please, Sire; I would gladly take some one's arm."

"M. d'Artagnan!" cried the king, ringing his little bell.—"Oh, Sire!" interrupted Fouquet, smiling in such a manner as made the king feel cold, "would you give me the captain of your musketeers to take me to my lodgings? A very equivocal kind of honour, that, Sire! A simple footman, I beg."

"And why, M. Fouquet? M. d'Artagnan conducts me often and well!"—"Yes, but when he conducts you, Sire, it is to obey you; while I—"—"Go on!"—"If I am obliged to return home supported by the leader of the musketeers, it would be everywhere said you had had me arrested."

"Arrested!" replied the king, who became paler than Fouquet himself,—"arrested! oh!"—"And why would they not say so?" continued Fouquet, still smiling; "and I would lay a wager there would be people found wicked enough to laugh at it." This sally disconcerted the monarch. Fouquet was skilful enough, or fortunate enough, to make Louis XIV. recoil before the appearance of the fact he meditated. M. d'Artagnan, when he appeared, received an order to desire a musketeer to accompany the superintendent.

"Quite unnecessary," said the latter; "sword for sword, I prefer Gourville, who is waiting for me below. But that will not prevent my enjoying the society of M. d'Artagnan. I am

glad he will see Belle-Isle, he who is so good a judge of fortifications."

D'Artagnan bowed, without at all comprehending what was going on. Fouquet bowed again and left the apartment, affecting all the slowness of a man who walks with difficulty. When once out of the castle, "I am saved!" said he. "Oh, yes, disloyal king! you shall see Belle-Isle, but it shall be when I am no longer there!" He disappeared, leaving D'Artagnan with the king.

"Captain," said the king, "you will follow M. Fouquet at the distance of a hundred paces."—"Yes, Sire."—"He is going to his lodgings again. You will go with him."—"Yes, Sire."—"You will arrest him in my name, and will shut him up in a carriage."

"In a carriage. Well, Sire?"—"In such a fashion that he may not, on the road, either converse with any one, or throw notes to people he may meet."—"That will be rather difficult, Sire."—"Not at all."—"Pardon me, Sire, I cannot stifle M. Fouquet; and if he asks for liberty to breathe, I cannot prevent him by shutting up glasses and blinds. He will throw out at the doors all the cries and notes possible."

"The case is provided for, M. d'Artagnan; a carriage with a trellis will obviate both the difficulties you point out."—"A carriage with an iron trellis!" cried D'Artagnan; "but a carriage with an iron trellis is not made in half an hour, and your Majesty commands me to go immediately to M. Fouquet's lodgings."—"Therefore, the carriage in question is already made."

"Ah, that is quite a different thing," said the captain; "if the carriage is ready made, very well, then, we have only to set it going."—"It is ready with the horses harnessed to it."—"Ah!"—"And the coachman, with the outriders, are waiting in the lower court of the castle."

D'Artagnan bowed. "There only remains for me to ask your Majesty to what place I shall conduct M. Fouquet."—"To the Castle of Angers at first."—"Very well, Sire."—"Afterwards we will see."—"Yes, Sire."

"M. d'Artagnan, one last word: you have remarked that for making this capture of M. Fouquet, I have not employed my guards, on which account M. de Gesvres will be furious."—"Your Majesty does not employ your guards," said the captain, a little humiliated, "because you mistrust M. de Gesvres, that is all."—"That is to say, Monsieur, that I have confidence in

you."—"I know that very well, Sire; and it is of no use to make so much of it."

"It is only for the sake of arriving at this, Monsieur, that if from this moment it should happen that by any chance,—any chance whatever,—M. Fouquet should escape,—such chances have been, Monsieur—"—"Oh, very often, Sire; but for others, not for me."—"And why not for you?"—"Because I, Sire, have for an instant wished to save M. Fouquet."

The king started. "Because," continued the captain, "I had then a right to do so, having guessed your Majesty's plan without your having spoken to me of it, and because I took an interest in M. Fouquet. Then, I was at liberty to show my interest in this man."

"In truth, Monsieur, you do not reassure me with regard to your services."—"If I had saved him then, I should have been perfectly innocent; I will say more, I should have done well, for M. Fouquet is not a bad man. But he was not willing; his destiny prevailed; he let the hour of liberty slip by. So much the worse! Now I have orders I will obey them, and M. Fouquet you may consider as a man arrested. He is at the Castle of Angers, is M. Fouquet."

"Oh, you have not got him yet, Captain."—"That concerns me; every one to his trade, Sire. Only, once more, reflect! Do you seriously give me orders to arrest M. Fouquet, Sire?"—"Yes, a thousand times, yes!"—"Write it, then."—"Here is the letter."

D'Artagnan read it, bowed to the king, and left the room. From the height of the terrace he perceived Gourville, who went by with a joyous air towards the lodgings of M. Fouquet.

CHAPTER CCXLVI

THE WHITE HORSE AND THE BLACK HORSE

"THAT is rather surprising," said D'Artagnan,—"Gourville running about the streets so gaily, when he is almost certain that M. Fouquet is in danger; when it is almost equally certain that it was Gourville who warned M. Fouquet just now by the note which was torn into a thousand pieces upon the terrace, and given to the winds by Monsieur the Superintendent. Gourville is rubbing his hands; that is because he has done something clever. Whence comes M. Gourville? Gourville is coming

from the Rue aux Herbes. Whither does the Rue aux Herbes lead?" And D'Artagnan followed, along the tops of the houses of Nantes dominated by the castle, the line traced by the streets, as he would have done upon a topographical plan; only, instead of the dead flat paper, the living chart rose in relief with the cries, the movements, and the shadows of the men and things.

Beyond the enclosure of the city the great verdant plains stretched out, bordering the Loire, and appeared to run towards the empurpled horizon, which was cut by the azure of the waters and the dark green of the marshes. Immediately outside the gates of Nantes two white roads were seen diverging like the separated fingers of a gigantic hand. D'Artagnan, who had taken in all the panorama at a glance in crossing the terrace, was led by the line of the Rue aux Herbes to the mouth of one of those roads which took its rise under the gates of Nantes. One step more, and he was about to descend the stairs, take his trellised carriage, and go towards the lodgings of M. Fouquet. But chance decreed that at the moment of recommencing his descent he was attracted by a moving point which was gaining ground upon that road.

"What is that?" said the musketeer to himself; "a horse galloping,—a runaway horse, no doubt. At what a pace he is going!" The moving point became detached from the road, and entered into the fields. "A white horse," continued the captain, who had just seen the colour thrown out luminously against the dark ground, "and he is mounted; it must be some boy whose horse is thirsty and has run away with him across lots to the drinking place." These reflections, rapid as lightning, simultaneous with visual perception, D'Artagnan had already forgotten when he descended the first steps of the staircase. Some morsels of paper were spread over the stairs, and shone out white against the dirty stones. "Eh, eh!" said the captain to himself, "here are some of the fragments of the note torn by M. Fouquet. Poor man! he had given his secret to the wind; the wind will have no more to do with it, and brings it back to the king. Decidedly, Fouquet, you play with misfortune! The game is not a fair one,—fortune is against you. The star of Louis XIV. obscures yours; the adder is stronger and more cunning than the squirrel." D'Artagnan picked up one of these morsels of paper as he descended. "Gourville's pretty little hand," cried he, while examining one of the fragments of the note; "I was not mistaken." And he read the word "horse." "Stop!" said he; and he examined another

Digitized by Google

upon which there was not a letter traced. Upon a third he read the word "white,"—"white horse," repeated he, like a child that is spelling. "Ah, *mordioux!*" cried the suspicious spirit, "a white horse!" And like that grain of powder which burning dilates into a centupled volume, D'Artagnan, enlarged by ideas and suspicions, rapidly reascended the stairs towards the terrace. The white horse was still galloping in the direction of the Loire, at the extremity of which, merging with the vapours of the water, a little sail appeared, balancing like an atom. "Oh, oh!" cried the musketeer, "no one but a man escaping danger would go at that pace across ploughed lands; there is only Fouquet, a financier, to ride thus in open day upon a white horse; there is no one but the lord of Belle-Isle who would make his escape towards the sea, while there are such thick forests on the land; and there is but one D'Artagnan in the world to catch M. Fouquet, who has half an hour's start, and who will have gained his boat within an hour."

This being said, the musketeer gave orders that the carriage with the iron trellis should be taken immediately to a thicket situated just outside the city. He selected his best horse, jumped upon his back, galloped along the Rue aux Herbes, taking, not the road Fouquet had taken, but the very bank of the Loire, certain that he should gain ten minutes upon the total of the distance, and at the intersection of the two lines come up with the fugitive, who could have no suspicion of being pursued in that direction. In the rapidity of the pursuit, and with the impatience of a persecutor animating himself in the chase as in war, D'Artagnan, so mild, so kind towards Fouquet, was surprised to find himself become ferocious and almost sanguinary. For a long time he galloped without catching sight of the white horse. His fury assumed the tints of rage; he doubted himself; he suspected that Fouquet had buried himself in some subterranean road, or that he had changed the white horse for one of those famous black ones, as swift as the wind, which D'Artagnan at St. Mandé had so frequently admired, envying their vigorous lightness.

At these moments, when the wind cut his eyes so as to make the water spring from them; when the saddle had become burning hot; when the galled and spurred horse reared with pain and threw behind him a shower of dust and stones,—D'Artagnan, raising himself in his stirrups, and seeing nothing on the waters, nothing beneath the trees, looked up into the air like a madman. He was losing his senses. In the paroxysms

of his eagerness he dreamed of aerial ways,—the discovery of the following century; he called to his mind Dædalus and his vast wings, which saved him from the prisons of Crete. A hoarse sigh broke from his lips as he repeated, devoured by the fear of ridicule, "I! I! duped by a Gourville! I! They will say I am growing old; they will say I have received a million to allow Fouquet to escape!" And he again dug his spurs into the sides of his horse; he had ridden astonishingly fast. Suddenly, at the extremity of some open pasture-ground behind the hedges, he saw a white form which showed itself, disappeared, and at last remained distinctly visible upon a rising ground. D'Artagnan's heart leaped with joy. He wiped the streaming sweat from his brow, relaxed the tension of his knees—freed from which the horse breathed more freely,—and gathering up his reins, moderated the speed of the vigorous animal, his active accomplice in this man-hunt. He had then time to study the direction of the road and his position with regard to Fouquet. The superintendent had completely winded his horse by crossing the soft grounds. He felt the necessity of gaining a more firm footing, and turned towards the road by the shortest secant line. D'Artagnan, on his part, had nothing to do but to ride straight beneath the sloping shores, which concealed him from the eyes of his enemy; so that he would cut him off on his reaching the road. Then the real race would begin; then the struggle would be in earnest.

D'Artagnan gave his horse good breathing-time. He observed that the superintendent had relaxed into a trot; that is to say, he likewise was indulging his horse. But both of them were too much pressed for time to allow them to continue long at that pace. The white horse sprang off like an arrow the moment his feet touched firm ground. D'Artagnan dropped his hand, and his black horse broke into a gallop. Both followed the same route; the quadruple echoes of the course were confounded. Fouquet had not yet perceived D'Artagnan. But on issuing from the slope a single echo struck the air; it was that of the steps of D'Artagnan's horse, which rolled along like thunder. Fouquet turned round, and saw behind him within a hundred paces his enemy bent over the neck of his horse. There could be no doubt,—the shining baldric, the red uniform —it was a musketeer. Fouquet slackened his hand likewise, and the white horse placed twenty feet more between his adversary and himself. "Oh, but," thought D'Artagnan, becoming very anxious, "that is not a common horse M. Fouquet is upon;

let us see!" And he attentively examined with his infallible eye the shape and capabilities of the courser. Round full quarters, a thin long tail, large hocks, thin legs dry as bars of steel, hoofs hard as marble. He spurred his own, but the distance between the two remained the same. D'Artagnan listened attentively; not a breath of the horse reached him, and yet he seemed to cut the air. The black horse, on the contrary, began to blow like a blacksmith's bellows.

"I must overtake him, if I kill my horse," thought the musketeer; and he began to saw the mouth of the poor animal, while he buried the rowels of his spurs in his sides. The maddened horse gained twenty *toises*, and came up within pistol-shot of Fouquet. "Courage!" said the musketeer to himself, "courage! the white horse will perhaps grow weaker; and if the horse does not fall, the master must fall at last." But horse and rider remained upright together, gaining ground by degrees. D'Artagnan uttered a wild cry, which made Fouquet turn round, and added speed to the white horse.

"A famous horse! a mad rider!" growled the captain. "*Hola! mordioux!* M. Fouquet! stop! in the king's name!" Fouquet made no reply. "Do you hear me?" shouted D'Artagnan, whose horse had just stumbled.—"*Pardieu!*" replied Fouquet, laconically, and rode on faster.

D'Artagnan was nearly mad; the blood rushed boiling to his temples and his eyes. "In the king's name!" cried he, again, "stop, or I will bring you down with a pistol-shot!"—"Do!" replied Fouquet, without relaxing his speed. D'Artagnan seized a pistol and cocked it, hoping that the noise of the spring would stop his enemy. "You have pistols likewise," said he; "turn and defend yourself."

Fouquet did turn round at the noise, and looking D'Artagnan full in the face, opened with his right hand the part of his dress which concealed his body, but he did not touch his holsters. There were not more than twenty paces between the two. "*Mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan, "I will not kill you; if you will not fire upon me, surrender! What is a prison?"—"I would rather die!" replied Fouquet; "I shall suffer less."

D'Artagnan, drunk with despair, hurled his pistol to the ground. "I will take you alive!" said he; and by a prodigy of skill of which this incomparable horseman alone was capable, he urged his horse forward to within ten paces of the white horse,—already his hand being stretched out to seize his prey.

Digitized by Google

"Kill me! kill me!" cried Fouquet; "it is more humane.—"No! alive! alive!" murmured the captain.

At this moment his horse made a false step for the second time, and Fouquet's again took the lead. It was an unheard-of spectacle,—this race between two horses which were only kept alive by the will of their riders. To the furious gallop had succeeded the fast trot, and then the simple trot; and the race appeared equally warm to the two fatigued athletes. D'Artagnan, quite in despair, seized his second pistol, and cocked it. "At your horse! not at you!" cried he to Fouquet. And he fired. The animal was hit in the rump; he made a furious bound, and plunged forward. At that moment D'Artagnan's horse fell dead.

"I am dishonoured!" thought the musketeer; "I am a miserable wretch!" Then he cried, "For pity's sake, M. Fouquet, throw me one of your pistols that I may blow out my brains!" But Fouquet rode on. "For mercy's sake! for mercy's sake!" cried D'Artagnan; "that which you will not do at this moment, I myself will do within an hour. But here upon this road I should die bravely, I should die esteemed; do me that service, M. Fouquet!"

M. Fouquet made no reply, but continued to trot on. D'Artagnan began to run after his enemy. Successively he threw off his hat, his coat, which embarrassed him, and then the sheath of his sword, which got between his legs as he was running. The sword in his hand even became too heavy, and he threw it after the sheath. The white horse began to rattle in his throat; D'Artagnan gained upon him. From a trot the exhausted animal sunk to a staggering walk; the foam from his mouth was mixed with blood. D'Artagnan made a desperate effort, sprang towards Fouquet, and seized him by the leg, saying in a broken, breathless voice, "I arrest you in the king's name! blow my brains out, if you like; we have both done our duty."

Fouquet hurled far from him into the river the two pistols which D'Artagnan might have seized, and dismounting from his horse, "I am your prisoner, Monsieur," said he; "will you take my arm, for I see you are ready to faint?"—"Thanks!" murmured D'Artagnan, who in fact felt the earth moving from under his feet, and the sky melting away over his head; and he rolled upon the sand without breath or strength. Fouquet hastened to the brink of the river, dipped some water in his hat, with which he bathed the temples of the musketeer, and intro-

duced a few drops between his lips. D'Artagnan raised himself up, looking round with a wandering eye. He saw Fouquet on his knees, with his wet hat in his hand, smiling upon him with ineffable sweetness. "You are not gone, then?" cried he. "Oh, Monsieur! the true king in loyalty, in heart, in soul, is not Louis of the Louvre or Philippe of Ste. Marguerite; it is you, the proscribed, the condemned!"

"I, who this day am ruined by a single error, M. d'Artagnan."—"What, in the name of Heaven, is that?"—"I should have had you for a friend! But how shall we return to Nantes? We are a great way from it."—"That is true," said D'Artagnan, gloomy and sad.

"The white horse will recover, perhaps; he is a good horse! Mount, M. d'Artagnan; I will walk till you have rested a little."—"Poor beast! and wounded too!" said the musketeer.—"He will go, I tell you; I know him. But we can do better still, let us both mount."—"We can try," said the captain.

But they had scarcely charged the animal with this double load when he began to stagger, then with a great effort walked a few minutes, then staggered again, and sank down dead by the side of the black horse, which he had just managed to reach.

"We will go on foot; destiny wills it so. The walk will be pleasant," said Fouquet, passing his arm through that of D'Artagnan.—"*Mordioux!*" cried the latter, with a fixed eye, a contracted brow, and a swelling heart. "A disgraceful day!"

They walked slowly the four leagues which separated them from the little wood behind which waited the carriage with the escort. When Fouquet perceived that sinister machine, he said to D'Artagnan, who cast down his eyes as if ashamed of Louis XIV., "There is an idea which is not that of a brave man, Captain d'Artagnan; it is not yours. What are these gratings for?"—"To prevent your throwing letters out."—"Ingenious!"—"But you can speak, if you cannot write," said D'Artagnan.

"Can I speak to you?"—"Why, certainly, if you wish to do so." Fouquet reflected for a moment, then looking the captain full in the face, "One single word," said he; "will you remember it?"—"I will not forget it."—"Will you speak it to whom I wish?"—"I will."

"St. Mandé," articulated Fouquet, in a low voice.—"Well; and for whom?"—"For Madame de Bellière or Pellisson."—"It shall be done." The carriage passed through Nantes, and took the route to Angers.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCXLVII

IN WHICH THE SQUIRREL FALLS, IN WHICH THE ADDER FLIES

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. The king, full of impatience, went to his cabinet on the terrace, and kept opening the door of the corridor to see what his secretaries were doing. M. Colbert, seated in the same place M. de Saint-Aignan had so long occupied in the morning, was chatting in a low voice with M. de Brienne. The king opened the door suddenly, and addressing them, "What do you say?" asked he.—"We were speaking of the first sitting of the States," said M. de Brienne, rising.—"Very well," replied the king, and returned to his room.

Five minutes after, the summons of the bell recalled Rose, whose hour it was. "Have you finished your copies?" asked the king.—"Not yet, Sire."—"See, then, if M. d'Artagnan is returned."—"Not yet, Sire."—"It is very strange!" murmured the king. "Call M. Colbert."

Colbert entered; he had been expecting this moment all the morning. "M. Colbert," said the king, very sharply, "it must be ascertained what is become of M. d'Artagnan." Colbert in his calm voice replied, "Where would your Majesty desire him to be sought for?"

"Eh, Monsieur! do you not know to what place I have sent him?" replied Louis, acrimoniously.—"Your Majesty has not told me."—"Monsieur, there are things that are to be guessed; and you, above all others, do guess them."—"I might have been able to imagine, Sire; but I do not presume to be positive."

Colbert had not finished these words when a much rougher voice than the king's interrupted the interesting conversation thus begun between Louis and his clerk. "D'Artagnan!" cried the king, with evident joy.

D'Artagnan, pale and in furious humour, cried to the king as he entered, "Sire, is it your Majesty who has given orders to my musketeers?"—"What orders?" said the king.—"About M. Fouquet's house?"—"None!" replied Louis.—"Ah, ah!" said D'Artagnan, biting his moustache; "I was not mistaken then; it was Monsieur here!" and he pointed to Colbert.

Digitized by Google

"What orders? Let me know," said the king.—"Orders to turn a house inside out, to beat M. Fouquet's servants, to force the drawers, to give over a peaceful house to pillage! *Mordioux!* the orders of a savage!"—"Monsieur!" said Colbert, becoming pale.—"Monsieur," interrupted D'Artagnan, "the king alone, understand,—the king alone has a right to command my musketeers; but as to you, I forbid you to do it, and I tell you so before his Majesty. Gentlemen who wear swords are not fellows with pens behind their ears."

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" murmured the king.—"It is humiliating," continued the musketeer; "my soldiers are disgraced. I do not command *reîtres*, nor clerks of the intendance, *mordioux!*"

"Well; but what is all this about?" said the king, with authority.—"About this, Sire: Monsieur—Monsieur, who could not guess your Majesty's orders, and consequently could not know I was gone to arrest M. Fouquet; Monsieur, who has caused the iron cage to be constructed for his patron of yesterday—has sent M. de Roncherat to the lodgings of M. Fouquet, and under pretence of taking away the superintendent's papers they have taken away the furniture. My musketeers have been placed round the house all the morning; such were my orders. Why did any one presume to order them to enter? Why, by forcing them to assist in this pillage, have they been made accomplices in it? *Mordioux!* we serve the king, we do; but we do not serve M. Colbert!"

"M. d'Artagnan," said the king, sternly, "take care! It is not in my presence that such explanations, and made in this tone, should take place."—"I have acted for the good of the king," said Colbert, in a faltering voice; "it is hard to be so treated by one of your Majesty's officers, and that without vengeance, on account of the respect I owe the king."

"The respect you owe the king," cried D'Artagnan, his eyes flashing fire, "consists in the first place in making his authority respected and his person beloved. Every agent of a power without control represents that power, and when people curse the hand which strikes them, it is to the royal hand that God makes the reproach, do you hear? Must a soldier hardened by forty years of wounds and blood give you this lesson, Monsieur? Must mercy be on my side, and ferocity on yours? You have caused the innocent to be arrested, bound, and imprisoned!"—"The accomplices, perhaps, of M. Fouquet," said Colbert.

Digitized by Google

"Who told you that M. Fouquet had accomplices, or even that he was guilty? The king alone knows that; his justice is not blind! When he shall say, 'Arrest and imprison' such and such people, then he shall be obeyed. Do not talk to me then any more of the respect you owe the king; and be careful of your words, that they may not chance to convey any menace,—for the king will not allow those to be threatened who do him service by others who do him disservice. And in case I should have—which God forbid!—a master so ungrateful, I would make myself respected."

Thus saying, D'Artagnan took his station haughtily in the king's cabinet, his eye flashing, his hand on his sword, his lips trembling, affecting much more anger than he really felt. Colbert, humiliated and devoured with rage, bowed to the king as if to ask his permission to leave the room. The king, drawn in opposite directions by his pride and by his curiosity, knew not which part to take. D'Artagnan saw him hesitate. To remain longer would have been an error; it was necessary to obtain a triumph over Colbert, and the only means was to touch the king so near and so strongly to the quick that his Majesty would have no other means of extricating himself but by choosing between the two antagonists. D'Artagnan then bowed as Colbert had done; but the king, who in preference to everything else was anxious to have all the exact details of the arrest of the superintendent of the finances from him who had made him tremble for a moment,—the king, perceiving that the ill-humour of D'Artagnan would put off for half an hour at least the details he was burning to be acquainted with,—Louis, we say, forgot Colbert, who had nothing new to tell him, and recalled his captain of the musketeers. "In the first place," said he, "let me see the result of your commission, Monsieur; you may repose afterwards."

D'Artagnan, who was just passing through the door, stopped at the voice of the king, retraced his steps, and Colbert was forced to leave the cabinet. His countenance assumed almost a purple hue, his black and threatening eyes shone with a dark fire beneath their thick brows; he stepped out, bowed before the king, half drew himself up in passing D'Artagnan, and went away with death in his heart. D'Artagnan, on being left alone with the king, softened immediately, and composing his countenance, "Sire," said he, "you are a young king. It is by the dawn that people judge whether the day will be fine or dull. How, Sire, will the people whom the hand of God has placed

under your law argue of your reign, if between you and them you allow angry and violent ministers to act? But let us speak of myself, Sire; let us leave a discussion that may appear idle and perhaps inconvenient to you. Let us speak of myself. I have arrested M. Fouquet."

"You took plenty of time about it," said the king, sharply. D'Artagnan looked at the king. "I perceive that I have expressed myself badly. I announced to your Majesty that I had arrested M. Fouquet."—"You did; and what then?"—"Well, I ought to have told your Majesty that M. Fouquet had arrested me; that would have been more just. I re-establish the truth, then: I have been arrested by M. Fouquet."

It was now the turn of Louis XIV. to be surprised. His Majesty was astonished. D'Artagnan, with his quick glance, appreciated what was passing in the heart of his master. He did not allow him time to put any questions. He related, with that poetry, that picturesqueness, which perhaps he alone possessed at that period, the escape of Fouquet, the pursuit, the furious race, and, lastly, the inimitable generosity of the superintendent, who might have fled ten times over, who might have killed the adversary sent in pursuit of him, and who had preferred imprisonment, and perhaps worse, to the humiliation of him who wished to take his liberty from him. In proportion as the tale advanced, the king became agitated, devouring the narrator's words, and knocking his finger-nails against one another.

"It results from this, then, Sire, in my eyes at least, that the man who conducts himself thus is a gallant man, and cannot be an enemy to the king. That is my opinion, and I repeat it to your Majesty. I know what the king will say to me, and I bow to it,—reasons of state. So be it! that in my eyes is very respectable. But I am a soldier, I have received my orders; my orders are executed,—very unwillingly on my part, it is true, but they are executed. I say no more."

"Where is M. Fouquet at this moment?" asked Louis, after a short silence.—"M. Fouquet, Sire," replied D'Artagnan, "is in the iron cage that M. Colbert had prepared for him, and is going as fast as four vigorous horses can drag him towards Angers."

"Why did you leave him on the road?"—"Because your Majesty did not tell me to go to Angers. The proof, the best proof of what I advance, is that the king desired me to be sought for but this minute; and then I have another reason."—

Digitized by Google

"What is that?"—"While I was with him, poor M. Fouquet would never attempt to escape."

"Well!" cried the king, with stupefaction.—"Your Majesty ought to understand, and does understand, certainly, that my warmest wish is to know that M. Fouquet is at liberty. I have given him to one of my brigadiers, the most stupid I could find among my musketeers, in order that the prisoner might have a chance of escaping."

"Are you mad, M. d'Artagnan?" cried the king, crossing his arms on his breast. "Do people speak such enormities, even when they have the misfortune to think them?"—"Ah, Sire, you cannot expect that I should be the enemy of M. Fouquet after what he has just done for you and me. No, no; if you desire that he should remain under your locks and bolts, never give him in charge to me; however closely wired might be the cage, the bird would in the end fly away."

"I am surprised," said the king, in a stern tone, "that you have not followed the fortunes of him whom M. Fouquet wished to place upon my throne. You had in him all you want,—affection and gratitude. In my service, Monsieur, you only find a master."—"If M. Fouquet had not gone to seek you in the Bastille, Sire," replied D'Artagnan, with a deeply impressive manner, "one single man would have gone there, and that man is myself,—you know that right well, Sire."

The king was brought to a pause. Before that speech of his captain of the musketeers, so frankly spoken and so true, the king had nothing to offer. On hearing D'Artagnan, Louis remembered the D'Artagnan of former times,—the man who at the Palais-Royal held himself concealed behind the curtains of his bed when the people of Paris, led on by Cardinal de Retz, came to assure themselves of the presence of the king; the D'Artagnan whom he saluted with his hand at the door of his carriage when repairing to Notre-Dame on his return to Paris; the soldier who had quitted his service at Blois; the lieutenant whom he had recalled near his person when the death of Mazarin gave him back the power; the man he had always found loyal, courageous, and devoted. Louis advanced towards the door and called Colbert. Colbert had not left the corridor where the secretaries were at work. Colbert appeared.

"Colbert, have you made a search at the house of M. Fouquet?"—"Yes, Sire."—"What has it produced?"—"M. de Roncherat, who was sent with your Majesty's musketeers, has remitted me some papers," replied Colbert.

Digitized by Google

"I will look at them. Give me your hand!"—"My hand, Sire?"—"Yes, that I may place it in that of M. d'Artagnan. In fact, M. d'Artagnan," added he, with a smile, turning towards the soldier, who at the sight of the clerk had resumed his haughty attitude, "you do not know this man; make his acquaintance." And he pointed to Colbert. "He has been but a moderate servant in subaltern positions, but he will be a great man if I raise him to the first rank."

"Sire!" stammered Colbert, confused with pleasure and fear.—"I have understood why," murmured D'Artagnan in the king's ear,—"he was jealous."—"Precisely; and his jealousy confined his wings."—"He will henceforth be a winged serpent," grumbled the musketeer, with a remnant of hatred against his recent adversary.

But Colbert, approaching him, offered to his eyes a countenance so different from that which he had been accustomed to see him wear; he appeared so good, so mild, so easy; his eyes took the expression of an intelligence so noble,—that D'Artagnan, a connoisseur in faces, was moved, and almost changed in his convictions. Colbert pressed his hand. "That which the king has just told you, Monsieur, proves how well his Majesty is acquainted with men. The inveterate opposition I have displayed up to this day against abuses and not against men, proves that I had it in view to prepare for my king a great reign, for my country a great blessing. I have many ideas, M. d'Artagnan. You will see them expand in the sun of public peace; and if I have not the certainty and good fortune to conquer the friendship of honest men, I am at least certain, Monsieur, that I shall obtain their esteem. For their admiration, Monsieur, I would give my life."

This change, this sudden elevation, this mute approbation of the king, gave the musketeer matter for much reflection. He bowed civilly to Colbert, who did not take his eyes off him. The king, when he saw they were reconciled, dismissed them. They left the room together. As soon as they were out of the cabinet, the new minister, stopping the captain, said, "Is it possible, M. d'Artagnan, that with such an eye as yours, you have not at the first glance, at the first inspection, discovered what sort of man I am?"—"M. Colbert," replied the musketeer, "the ray of the sun which we have in our eyes prevents us from seeing the most ardent flames. The man in power radiates, you know; and since you are there, why should

Digitized by Google

you continue to persecute him who has just fallen into disgrace, and fallen from such a height?"

"I, Monsieur!" said Colbert; "oh, Monsieur! I would never persecute him. I wished to administer the finances, and to administer them alone, because I am ambitious, and, above all, because I have the most entire confidence in my own merit; because I know that all the gold of this country will fall beneath my eyes, and I love to look at the king's gold; because, if I live thirty years, in thirty years not a *denier* of it will remain in my hands; because with that gold I will build granaries, edifices, cities, and will dig ports; because I will create a marine, will equip navies which shall bear the name of France to the most distant peoples; because I will create libraries and academies; because I will make of France the first country in the world, and the richest. These are the motives for my animosity against M. Fouquet, who prevented my acting. And then, when I shall be great and strong, when France is great and strong, in my turn then I will cry, 'Mercy!'"

"Mercy, did you say? then ask his liberty of the king. The king crushes him only on your account." Colbert again raised his head. "Monsieur," said he, "you know that it is not so, and that the king has his personal enmities against M. Fouquet; it is not for me to teach you that."—"But the king will relax; he will forget."—"The king never forgets, M. d'Artagnan. Hark! the king calls. He is going to issue an order. I have not influenced him, have I? Listen."

The king, in fact, was calling his secretaries. "M. d'Artagnan," said he.—"I am here, Sire."—"Give twenty of your musketeers to M. de Saint-Aignan, to form a guard for M. Fouquet." D'Artagnan and Colbert exchanged looks. "And from Angers," continued the king, "they will conduct the prisoner to the Bastille in Paris."—"You were right," said the captain to the minister.

"Saint-Aignan," continued the king, "you will have any one shot who shall attempt to speak privately with M. Fouquet during the journey."—"But myself, Sire?" said the duke.—"You, Monsieur,—you will only speak to him in the presence of the musketeers." The duke bowed, and departed to execute his commission.

D'Artagnan was about to retire likewise; but the king stopped him. "Monsieur," said he, "you will go immediately and take possession of the isle and fief of Belle-Isle-en-Mer."—"Yes, Sire. Alone?"—"You will take a sufficient number of

Digitized by Google

troops to prevent delay, in case the place should be contumacious." A murmur of adulatory incredulity arose from the group of courtiers. "That is to be done," said D'Artagnan.

"I saw the place in my infancy," resumed the king, "and I do not wish to see it again. You have heard me? Go, Monsieur, and do not return without the keys of the place." Colbert went up to D'Artagnan. "A commission which if you carry it out well," said he, "will be worth a marshal's bâton to you."

"Why do you employ the words, 'if you carry it out well'?" —"Because it is difficult."—"Ah! in what respect?"—"You have friends in Belle-Isle, M. d'Artagnan; and it is not an easy thing for men like you to march over the bodies of their friends to obtain success."

D'Artagnan hung down his head, while Colbert returned to the king. A quarter of an hour after, the captain received the written order from the king to blow up the fortress of Belle-Isle in case of resistance, with the power of life and death over all the inhabitants or refugees, and an injunction not to allow one to escape. "Colbert was right," thought D'Artagnan,—"my bâton of a marshal of France will cost the lives of my two friends. Only they seem to forget that my friends are not more stupid than the birds, and that they will not wait for the hand of the fowler to extend their wings. I will show them that hand so plainly that they will have quite time enough to see it. Poor Porthos! poor Aramis! No; my fortune shall not cost your wings a feather."

Having thus determined, D'Artagnan assembled the royal army, embarked it at Paimbœuf, and set sail without losing a moment.

CHAPTER CCXLVIII

BELLE-ISLE-EN-MER

At the extremity of the pier, upon the promenade which the furious sea beats at evening tide, two men, holding each other by the arm, were conversing in an animated and expansive tone, without the possibility of any other human being hearing their words, borne away, as they were, one by one, by the gusts of wind with the white foam swept from the crests of the waves. The sun had just gone down in the vast sheet of ocean, red like

a gigantic crucible. From time to time, one of these men, turning towards the east, cast an anxious, inquiring look over the sea. The other, interrogating the features of his companion, seemed to seek for information in his looks. Then, both silent, both busied with dismal thoughts, they resumed their walk. Every one has already perceived that those two men were our proscribed heroes, Porthos and Aramis, who had taken refuge in Belle-Isle since the ruin of their hopes, since the discomfiture of the vast plan of M. d'Herblay.

"It is of no use your saying anything to the contrary, my dear Aramis," repeated Porthos, inhaling vigorously the saline air with which he filled his powerful chest. "It is of no use, Aramis. The disappearance of all the fishing-boats that went out two days ago is not an ordinary circumstance. There has been no storm at sea; the weather has been constantly calm, not even the slightest gale; and even if we had had a tempest, all our boats would not have foundered. I repeat, it is strange. This complete disappearance astonishes me, I tell you."

"True," murmured Aramis. "You are right, friend Porthos; it is true, there is something strange in it."—"And further," added Porthos, whose ideas the assent of the Bishop of Vannes seemed to enlarge,—"and further, have you remarked that if the boats have perished, not a single plank has been washed ashore?"—"I have remarked that as well as you."—"Have you remarked, besides, that the only two boats we had left in the whole island, and which I sent in search of the others—"

Aramis here interrupted his companion by a cry, and by so sudden a movement that Porthos stopped as if he were stupefied. "What do you say, Porthos? What! You have sent the two boats—"—"In search of the others. Yes; to be sure I have," replied Porthos, quite simply.—"Unhappy man! What have you done? Then we are indeed lost," cried the bishop.

"Lost! What did you say?" exclaimed the terrified Porthos. "How lost, Aramis? How are we lost?" Aramis bit his lips. "Nothing! nothing! Your pardon, I meant to say—" —"What?"—"That if we were inclined—if we took a fancy to make an excursion by sea, we could not."

"Very good! and why should that vex you? A fine pleasure, *ma foi!* For my part, I don't regret it at all. What I regret is certainly not the more or less amusement we can find at Belle-Isle; what I regret, Aramis, is Pierrefonds, is Bracieux, is Le Vallon, is my beautiful France! Here we are not in France, my dear friend; we are—I know not where. Oh! I tell you in

the full sincerity of my soul,—and your affection will excuse my frankness,—but I declare to you I am not happy at Belle-Isle. No; in good truth, I am not happy!" Aramis breathed a stifled sigh. "Dear friend," replied he, "that is why it is so sad a thing you have sent the two boats we had left in search of those which disappeared two days ago. If you had not sent them away, we would have departed."

"'Departed!' And the orders, Aramis?"—"What orders?"—"*Parbleu!* Why, the orders you have been constantly and on all occasions repeating to me,—that we were to hold Belle-Isle against the usurper. You know very well!"—"That is true!" murmured Aramis again.—"You see, then, plainly, my friend, that we could not depart; and that the sending away of the boats in search of the others is not prejudicial to us in any way."

Aramis was silent; and his vague glance, luminous as that of a gull, hovered for a long time over the sea, interrogating space, and seeking to pierce the very horizon.

"With all that, Aramis," continued Porthos, who adhered to his idea, and that the more closely since the bishop had found it correct,—"with all that, you give me no explanation about what can have happened to these unfortunate boats. I am assailed by cries and complaints whichever way I go. The children cry at seeing the desolation of the women, as if I could restore the absent husbands and fathers. What do you suppose, my friend, and what ought I to answer them?"—"Suppose everything, my good Porthos, and say nothing."

This reply did not satisfy Porthos at all. He turned away, grumbling some words in a very ill humour. Aramis stopped the valiant soldier. "Do you remember," said he, in a melancholy tone, pressing the two hands of the giant between his own with an affectionate cordiality, "do you remember, my friend, that in the glorious days of our youth—do you remember, Porthos, when we were all strong and valiant—we and the other two—if we had then had an inclination to return to France, do you think this sheet of salt water would have stopped us?"—"Oh!" said Porthos; "six leagues!"

"If you had seen me get astride of a plank, would you have remained on land, Porthos?"—"No, *pardieu!* No, Aramis. But nowadays what sort of a plank should we want, my friend,—I, in particular?" And the Seigneur de Bracieux cast a proud glance over his colossal rotundity, with a loud laugh. "And do you mean seriously to say that you are not a little

Digitized by Google

tired of Belle-Isle also, and that you would not prefer the comforts of your dwelling,—of your episcopal palace at Vannes? Come, confess!"—"No," replied Aramis, without daring to look at Porthos.

"Let us stay where we are, then," said his friend, with a sigh which in spite of the efforts he made to restrain it escaped with a loud report from his breast. "Let us remain! let us remain! And yet," added he,—"and yet, if we seriously wished, but that decidedly, if we had a fixed idea, one firmly taken, to return to France, and there were no boats—"

"Have you remarked another thing, my friend?—that is, since the disappearance of our boats, during the two days' absence of the fishermen, not a single small boat has landed on the shores of the isle?"—"Yes, certainly; you are right. I have remarked it also; and the observation was the more naturally made, for before the last two fatal days we saw boats and shallops arrive by dozens."

"I must inquire," said Aramis, suddenly, and with emphasis. "And then, if I had a raft constructed—"—"But there are some canoes, my friend; shall I go on board one?"—"A canoe! a canoe! Can you think of such a thing, Porthos? A canoe to be upset in! No, no," said the Bishop of Vannes; "it is not our trade to ride upon the waves. We will wait; we will wait."

And Aramis continued walking about with increased agitation. Porthos, who grew tired of following all the feverish movements of his friend; Porthos, who in his calmness and trust understood nothing of the sort of exasperation which was betrayed by the bishop's continual convulsive starts,—Porthos stopped him. "Let us sit down upon this rock," said he. "Place yourself there, close to me, Aramis, and I conjure you for the last time to explain to me in a manner I can comprehend,—explain to me what we are doing here."—"Porthos!" said Aramis, much embarrassed.

"I know that the false king wished to dethrone the true king. That is a fact that I understand. Well—"—"Yes," said Aramis.—"I know that the false king formed the project of selling Belle-Isle to the English. I understand that too."—"Yes."—"I know that we engineers and captains came and threw ourselves into Belle-Isle to take the direction of the works and the command of the ten companies levied and paid by M. Fouquet, or rather the ten companies of his son-in-law. All that is plain."

Digitized by Google

Aramis arose in a state of great impatience. He might be said to be a lion importuned by a gnat. Porthos held him by the arm. "But what I cannot understand, what in spite of all the efforts of my mind and all my reflections I cannot comprehend and never shall comprehend, is, that instead of sending us troops, instead of sending us reinforcements of men, munitions, and provisions, they leave us without boats, they leave Belle-Isle without arrivals, without help; it is that instead of establishing with us a correspondence, whether by signals or written or verbal communications, they intercept all relations with us. Tell me, Aramis; answer me, or rather, before answering me, will you allow me to tell you what I have thought? Will you hear what my idea is, what imagination I have conceived?" The bishop raised his head. "Well, Aramis," continued Porthos, "I have thought, I have had an idea; I have imagined that an event has taken place in France. I dreamed of M. Fouquet all the night; I dreamed of dead fish, broken eggs, chambers badly furnished, meanly kept. Bad dreams, my dear D'Herblay; very unlucky, such dreams!"

"Porthos, what is that yonder?" interrupted Aramis, rising suddenly, and pointing out to his friend a black spot upon the empurpled line of the water.—"A boat!" said Porthos; "yes, it is a boat! Ah! we shall have some news at last."—"There are two!" cried the bishop, on discovering another mast; "two! three! four!"—"Five!" said Porthos, in his turn. "Six! seven! Ah! *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* it is a whole fleet!"

"Our boats returning, probably," said Aramis, very uneasily, in spite of the assurance he affected.—"They are very large for fishing-boats," observed Porthos; "and do you not remark, my friend, that they come from the Loire?"—"They come from the Loire—yes—"—"And look! everybody here sees them as well as ourselves; look, the women and children are beginning to get upon the jetty!"

An old fisherman passed. "Are those our boats yonder?" asked Aramis. The old man looked steadily into the horizon. "No, Monseigneur," replied he; "they are lighter-boats in the king's service."—"Boats in the royal service?" replied Aramis, starting. "How do you know that?" said he.—"By the flag."

"But," said Porthos, "the boat is scarcely visible; how the devil, my friend, can you distinguish the flag?"—"I see there is one," replied the old man; "our boats, or trade-lighters, do not carry any. That sort of craft is generally used for the transport of troops."—"Ah!" said Aramis.

Digitized by Google

"*Vivat!*" cried Porthos, "they are sending us reinforcements; don't you think they are, Aramis?"—"Probably."—"Unless it is the English coming."—"By the Loire? That would have an ill look, Porthos, for they must have come through Paris!"—"You are right; they are reinforcements, decidedly, or provisions."

Aramis leaned his head upon his hands and made no reply. Then, all at once, "Porthos," said he, "have the alarm sounded."—"The alarm! do you think of such a thing?"—"Yes, and let the cannoneers mount to their batteries; let the artillery-men be at their pieces, and be particularly watchful of the coast batteries." Porthos opened his eyes to their widest extent. He looked attentively at his friend, to convince himself that he was in his proper senses.

"I will do it, my dear Porthos," continued Aramis, in his most bland tone; "I will go and have these orders executed myself if you do not go, my friend."—"Well, I will go instantly!" said Porthos, going to execute the order, casting all the while looks behind him to see if the Bishop of Vannes were not making a mistake, and if, on returning to more rational ideas, he would not recall him. The alarm was sounded, the trumpets brayed, and drums rolled; the great bell of the belfry was put in motion. The dikes and piers were quickly filled with the curious and soldiers; the matches sparkled in the hands of the artillery-men, placed behind the large cannon bedded in their stone carriages. When every man was at his post, when all the preparations for the defence were made, "Permit me, Aramis, to try to comprehend," whispered Porthos, timidly, in Aramis's ear.—"My dear friend, you will comprehend but too soon," murmured M. d'Herblay, in reply to this question of his lieutenant.

"The fleet which is coming yonder with sails unfurled straight towards the port of Belle-Isle, is a royal fleet, is it not?"—"But as there are two kings in France, Porthos, to which of these two kings does this fleet belong?"

"Oh, you open my eyes!" replied the gaint, stunned by this argument. And Porthos, whose eyes his friend's reply had just opened, or rather, had thickened the bandage which covered his sight, went with his best speed to the batteries to overlook his people and exhort every one to do his duty. In the meantime Aramis, with his eyes fixed on the horizon, saw the ships continue to draw nearer. The people and the soldiers, mounted upon all the summits or irregularities of the rocks,

could distinguish the masts, then the lower sails, and at last the hulls of the lighters, bearing at the masthead the royal flag of France. It was quite night when one of these vessels which had created such a sensation among the inhabitants of Belle-Isle was moored within cannon-shot of the place. It was soon seen, notwithstanding the darkness, that a sort of agitation reigned on board this vessel, from the side of which a skiff was lowered, of which the three rowers, bending to their oars, took the direction of the port, and in a few instants struck land at the foot of the fort. The commander of this yawl jumped on shore. He had a letter in his hand, which he waved in the air, and seemed to wish to communicate with somebody. This man was soon recognised by several soldiers as one of the pilots of the island. He was the skipper of one of the two boats kept back by Aramis, which Porthos, in his anxiety with regard to the fate of the fishermen who had disappeared for two days, had sent in search of the missing boats. He asked to be conducted to M. d'Herblay. Two soldiers, at a signal from the sergeant, placed him between them and escorted him. Aramis was upon the quay. The envoy presented himself before the Bishop of Vannes. The darkness was almost complete, notwithstanding the torches borne at a small distance by the soldiers who were following Aramis in his rounds.

"Well, Jonathas, from whom do you come?"—"Monseigneur, from those who captured me."—"Who captured you?"—"You know, Monseigneur, we set out in search of our comrades?"—"Yes,—and afterwards?"—"Well, Monseigneur, within a short league we were captured by a *chasse-marée* belonging to the king."—"Ah!" said Aramis.—"Of which king?" cried Porthos. Jonathas started.

"Speak!" continued the bishop.—"We were captured, Monseigneur, and joined to those who had been taken yesterday morning."—"What was the cause of the mania for capturing you all?" said Porthos.—"Monsieur, to prevent us from telling you."

Porthos was again at a loss to comprehend. "And they have released you to-day?" asked he.—"That I might tell you they have captured us, Monsieur."—"Trouble upon trouble!" thought honest Porthos.

During this time Aramis was reflecting. "Humph!" said he; "then I suppose it is a royal fleet blockading the coasts?"—"Yes, Monseigneur."—"Who commands it?"—"The captain of the king's musketeers."—"D'Artagnan?"—"D'Artagnan!"

exclaimed Porthos.—" I believe that is the name."—" And did he give you this letter? "—" Yes, Monseigneur."—" Bring the torch nearer."—" It is his writing," said Porthos.

Aramis eagerly read the following lines:—

" Order of the king to take Belle-Isle; order to put the garrison to the sword if they resist; order to make prisoners all the men of the garrison.

(Signed) " D'ARTAGNAN (who the day before yesterday arrested M. Fouquet that he might be sent to the Bastille)."

Aramis turned pale, and crushed the paper in his hands. " What is it? " asked Porthos.—" Nothing, my friend, nothing. Tell me, Jonathas."—" Monseigneur! "—" Did you speak to M. d'Artagnan? "—" Yes, Monseigneur."—" What did he say to you? "—" That for more ample information he would speak with Monseigneur."—" Where? "—" On board his own vessel."

" ' On board his vessel '! " and Porthos repeated, " ' On board his vessel '! "—" Monsieur the musketeer," continued Jonathas, " told me to take you both on board my canoe and bring you to him."—" Let us go at once! " exclaimed Porthos; " dear D'Artagnan! "

But Aramis stopped him. " Are you mad? " cried he. " Who knows that it is not a snare? "—" Of the other king? " said Porthos, mysteriously.

" A snare, in fact,—that's what it is, my friend! "—" Very possibly. What is to be done, then? If D'Artagnan sends for us—"—" Who assures you that D'Artagnan sends for us? "—" Yes, but—but his writing—"—" Writing is easily counterfeited. This looks counterfeited — trembling—" — " You are always right; but in the meantime we know nothing." Aramis was silent. " It is true," said the good Porthos; " we do not want to know anything."

" What shall I do? " asked Jonathas.—" You will return on board this captain's vessel."—" Yes, Monseigneur."—" And will tell him that we beg he will himself come to the island."—" Ah, I comprehend! " said Porthos.

" Yes, Monseigneur," replied Jonathas; " but if the captain should refuse to come to Belle-Isle? "—" If he refuses, as we have cannon, we will make use of them."—" What! against D'Artagnan? "—" If it is D'Artagnan, Porthos, he will come. Go, Jonathas, go! "

" *Ma foi!* I no longer comprehend anything," murmured

Google

Porthos.—"I will make you comprehend all, my dear friend; the time for it is come. Sit down upon this gun-carriage, open your ears, and listen well to me."—"Oh, *pardieu!* I shall listen,—no fear of that."

"May I depart, Monseigneur?" cried Jonathas.—"Yes; go and bring back an answer. Allow the canoe to pass, you men there!" and the canoe pushed off to regain the fleet. Aramis took Porthos by the hand, and began the explanations.

CHAPTER CCXLIX

THE EXPLANATIONS OF ARAMIS

"WHAT I have to say to you, friend Porthos, will probably surprise you, but it will instruct you."—"I like to be surprised," said Porthos, in a kindly tone; "do not spare me, therefore, I beg. I am hardened against emotions; don't fear, speak out."

"It is difficult, Porthos, it is—difficult; for in truth—I warn you—again—I have very strange things, very extraordinary things, to tell you."—"Oh, you speak so well, my friend, that I could listen to you for days together. Speak, then, I beg; and—stop, I have an idea: I will, to make your task more easy, to assist you in telling me such things, question you."—"I shall be pleased at your doing so."

"What are we going to fight for, Aramis?"—"If you put to me many such questions as that, if that is your way of assisting my task of revelation,—by such questions as that,—Porthos, you will not help me at all. On the contrary, that is precisely the Gordian knot. But, my friend, with a man like you, good, generous, and devoted, the confession must be made bravely. I have deceived you, my worthy friend."

"You have deceived me!"—"Good heavens! yes."—"Was it for my good, Aramis?"—"I thought so, Porthos; I thought so sincerely, my friend."—"Then," said the honest Seigneur de Bracieux, "you have rendered me a service, and I thank you for it,—for if you had not deceived me, I might have deceived myself. In what, then, have you deceived me?"—"In that I was serving the usurper against whom Louis XIV. at this moment is directing his efforts."

"The usurper!" said Porthos, scratching his head. "That

is—well, I do not too clearly comprehend that!"—"He is one of the two kings who are contending for the crown of France."—"Very well! Then you were serving him who is not Louis XIV.?"—"You have hit upon the matter in a word."

"It results that—"—"It results that we are rebels, my poor friend."—"The devil! the devil!" cried Porthos, much disappointed.—"Oh, but, dear Porthos, be calm! we shall still find means of getting out of the affair, trust me."—"It is not that which makes me uneasy," replied Porthos; "that which alone touches me is that ugly word 'rebels.'"

"Ah! but—"—"And so the duchy that was promised me—"—"It was the usurper who was to give it to you."—"And that is not the same thing, Aramis," said Porthos, majestically.

"My friend, if it had only depended upon me, you should have become a prince." Porthos began to bite his nails after a melancholy fashion. "That is where you have been wrong," continued he, "in deceiving me; for that promised duchy I reckoned upon. Oh, I reckoned upon it seriously, knowing you to be a man of your word, Aramis."—"Poor Porthos! pardon me, I implore you!"

"So then," continued Porthos, without replying to the bishop's prayer,—"so then, it seems, I have quite fallen out with Louis XIV.?"—"Oh, I will settle all that, my good friend; I will settle all that. I will take it upon myself alone!"

"Aramis!"—"No, no, Porthos, I conjure you, let me act. No false generosity; no inopportune devotedness! You knew nothing of my projects; you have done nothing of yourself. With me it is different. I alone am the author of the plot. I stood in need of my inseparable companion; I called upon you, and you came to me in remembrance of our ancient device, 'All for one, one for all.' My crime was that of being an egotist."—"Now, that is the word I like," said Porthos; "and seeing that you have acted entirely for yourself, it is impossible for me to blame you. It is so natural." And upon this sublime reflection, Porthos pressed the hand of his friend cordially.

In presence of this ingenuous greatness of soul, Aramis felt himself little. It was the second time he had been compelled to bend before real superiority of heart, much more powerful than splendour of mind. He replied by a mute and energetic pressure to the kind endearment of his friend. "Now," said Porthos, "that we have come to an explanation, now that I am perfectly aware of our situation with respect to Louis XIV., I think, my friend, it is time to make me comprehend the

political intrigue of which we are the victims,—for I plainly see there is a political intrigue at the bottom of all this."

"D'Artagnan, my good Porthos, D'Artagnan is coming, and will detail it to you in all its circumstances; but excuse me, I am overcome with grief, bowed down by pain, and I have need of all my presence of mind, of all my reflection, to extricate you from the false position in which I have so imprudently involved you; but nothing can be more clear, nothing more plain, than your position henceforth. The king, Louis XIV., has now but one enemy; that enemy is myself, myself alone. I have made you a prisoner, you have followed me; to-day I liberate you, you fly back to your prince. You can perceive, Porthos, there is not a single difficulty in all this."—"Do you think so?" said Porthos.—"I am quite sure of it."—"Then why," said the admirable good sense of Porthos,—"then why, if we are in such an easy position, why, my friend, do we prepare cannon, muskets, and engines of all sorts? It seems to me it would be much more simple to say to Captain D'Artagnan, 'My dear friend, we have been mistaken; that error is to be repaired. Open the door to us; let us pass through, and good-day!'"

"Ah! that!" said Aramis, shaking his head.—"Why do you say 'that'? Do you not approve of my plan, my friend?"—"I see a difficulty in it."—"What is it?"—"The possibility that D'Artagnan may come with orders which will oblige us to defend ourselves."

"What! defend ourselves against D'Artagnan? Folly! Against the good D'Artagnan?" Aramis once more replied by shaking his head. "Porthos," at length he said, "if I have had the matches lighted and the guns pointed; if I have had the signal of alarm sounded; if I have called every man to his post upon the ramparts,—those good ramparts of Belle-Isle which you have so well fortified,—it is for something. Wait to judge; or rather, no, do not wait—"—"What can I do?"

"If I knew, my friend, I would have told you."—"But there is one thing much more simple than defending ourselves,—a boat, and away for France where—"—"My dear friend," said Aramis, smiling with a sort of melancholy, "do not let us reason like children; let us be men in counsel and execution. But, hark! I hear a hail for landing at the port. Attention, Porthos, serious attention!"

"It is D'Artagnan, do doubt," said Porthos, in a voice of thunder, approaching the parapet.—"Yes, it is I," replied the

captain of the musketeers, running lightly up the steps of the pier, and gaining rapidly the little esplanade upon which his two friends waited for him. As soon as he came towards them Porthos and Aramis observed an officer who followed D'Artagnan, treading apparently in his very steps. The captain stopped upon the stairs of the pier when half-way up. His companion imitated him.

"Make your men draw back," cried D'Artagnan to Porthos and Aramis; "let them retire out of hearing." The order being given by Porthos was executed immediately. Then D'Artagnan, turning towards him who followed him, said, "Monsieur, we are no longer here on board the king's fleet, where, in virtue of your order, you spoke so arrogantly to me just now."—"Monsieur," replied the officer, "I did not speak arrogantly to you; I simply but rigorously obeyed what I had been commanded. I have been directed to follow you; I follow you. I am directed not to allow you to communicate with any one without taking cognisance of what you do; I am present therefore at your interview.'

D'Artagnan trembled with rage, and Porthos and Aramis, who heard this dialogue, trembled likewise, but with uneasiness and fear. D'Artagnan, biting his moustache with that vivacity which denoted in him the state of exasperation closely to be followed by a terrible explosion, approached the officer. "Monsieur," said he, in a low voice, the more impressive, because affecting a calm, and filled with storm,—"Monsieur, when I sent a canoe hither, you wished to know what I wrote to the defenders of Belle-Isle. You produced an order to that effect; and in my turn I instantly showed you the note I had written. When the skipper of the boat sent by me returned; when I received the reply of these two gentlemen [pointing to Aramis and Porthos],—you heard every word the messenger said. All that was plainly in your orders, all that was well followed, well executed, punctiliously enough, was it not?"

"Yes, Monsieur," stammered the officer; "yes, without doubt, but—"—"Monsieur," continued D'Artagnan, growing warm,—"Monsieur, when I manifested the intention of quitting my vessel to cross to Belle-Isle, you insisted on coming with me. I did not hesitate; I brought you with me. You are now at Belle-Isle, are you not?"

"Yes, Monsieur; but—"—"But—the question no longer is of M. Colbert, who has given you that order, or of any one in the world whose instructions you are following; the question

Digitized by Google

now is of a man who is a clog upon M. d'Artagnan, and who is alone with M. d'Artagnan upon steps whose base is bathed by thirty feet of salt water,—a bad position for that man, a bad position, Monsieur, I warn you."

"But, Monsieur, if I am a restraint upon you," said the officer timidly and almost faintly, "it is my duty which—"—"Monsieur, you have had the misfortune, you, or those who sent you, to insult me. It is done. I cannot seek redress from those who employ you,—they are unknown to me, or are at too great a distance. But you are under my hand, and I swear that if you make one step behind me when I lift a foot to go up to those gentlemen,—I swear to you by my name, I will cleave your head with my sword, and pitch you into the water. Oh, that must come which will come! I have only been six times angry in my life, Monsieur, and in the five times which have preceded this, I have killed my man."

The officer did not stir; he became pale under this terrible threat, and replied with simplicity, "Monsieur, you are wrong in acting against the orders given me." Porthos and Aramis, mute and trembling at the top of the parapet, cried to the musketeer, "Dear D'Artagnan, take care!"

D'Artagnan made them a sign to keep silence, raised his foot with a terrifying calmness to mount the stair, and turned round, sword in hand, to see if the officer followed him. The officer made a sign of the cross and followed. Porthos and Aramis, who knew their D'Artagnan, uttered a cry, and rushed down to prevent the blow which they thought they already heard. But D'Artagnan, passing his sword into his left hand, said to the officer, in an agitated voice, "Monsieur, you are a brave man. You will better comprehend what I am going to say to you now than what I have just said to you."—"Speak, M. d'Artagnan, speak!" replied the brave officer.

"These gentlemen we have just seen, and against whom you have orders, are my friends."—"I know they are, Monsieur."—"You can understand if I ought to act towards them as your instructions prescribe."—"I understand your reserves."—"Very well; permit me, then, to converse with them without a witness."

"M. d'Artagnan, if I yielded to your request, if I did that which you beg me to do, I should break my word; but if I do not do it, I shall disoblige you. I prefer the one to the other. Converse with your friends, and do not despise me, Monsieur, for doing for the sake of you, whom I esteem and honour,—do

not despise me for committing for you, and you alone, an unworthy act." D'Artagnan, much agitated, passed his arms rapidly round the neck of the young man, and went up to his friends. The officer, enveloped in his cloak, sat down on the damp weed-covered steps.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan to his friends, "such is my position, as you see." They all three embraced. All three pressed one another in their arms as in the glorious days of their youth.

"What is the meaning of all these rigours?" said Porthos. —"You ought to have some suspicions of what it is," said D'Artagnan.—"Not much, I assure you, my dear Captain,—for, in fact, I have done nothing; no more has Aramis," the worthy baron hastened to say.

D'Artagnan darted a reproachful look at the prelate which penetrated that hardened heart. "Dear Porthos!" cried the Bishop of Vannes.

"You see what has been done against you," said D'Artagnan, —"interception of all that is coming to or going from Belle-Isle. Your boats are all seized. If you had endeavoured to fly, you would have fallen into the hands of the cruisers which plough the sea in all directions on the watch for you. The king wants you to be taken, and he will take you." And D'Artagnan tore several hairs from his grey moustache. Aramis became sombre, Porthos angry. "My idea was this," continued D'Artagnan: "to make you both come on board, to keep you near me, and restore you your liberty. But now, who can say that when I return to my ship I may not find a superior; that I may not find secret orders which will take from me my command, and give it to another, who will dispose of you and me and deprive us of all resources?"

"We must remain at Belle-Isle," said Aramis, resolutely; "and I assure you, for my part, I will not surrender easily." Porthos said nothing.

D'Artagnan remarked the silence of his friend. "I have another trial to make of this officer, of this brave fellow who accompanies me, whose courageous resistance makes me very happy,—for it denotes an honest man, who, although an enemy, is a thousand times better than a complaisant coward. Let us try to learn from him what he has the right of doing, and what his orders permit or forbid."—"Let us try," said Aramis.

D'Artagnan came to the parapet, leaned over towards the steps of the pier, and called the officer, who immediately came up. "Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, after having exchanged

the most cordial courtesies, natural between gentlemen who know and appreciate each other worthily,—"Monsieur, if I wished to take away these gentlemen from this place, what would you do?"—"I should not oppose it, Monsieur; but having direct orders, formal orders, to take them under my guard, I should detain them."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan.—"It is all over," said Aramis, gloomily. Porthos did not stir. "But still take Porthos," said the Bishop of Vannes; "he can prove to the king, I will help him in doing so, and you also can, M. d'Artagnan, that he has had nothing to do in this affair."

"Hum!" said D'Artagnan. "Will you come? Will you follow me, Porthos? The king is merciful."—"I beg to reflect," said Porthos, nobly.—"You will remain here, then?"—"Until fresh orders," said Aramis, with vivacity.—"Until we have had an idea," resumed D'Artagnan; "and I now believe that will not be a long time, for I have one already."

"Let us say adieu, then," said Aramis; "but in truth, my good Porthos, you ought to go."—"No!" said the latter, laconically.—"As you please," replied Aramis, a little wounded in his nervous susceptibility at the morose tone of his companion. "Only I am reassured by the promise of an idea from D'Artagnan, —an idea I fancy I have divined."

"Let us see," said the musketeer, placing his ear near Aramis's mouth. The latter spoke several words rapidly, to which D'Artagnan replied, "That is it precisely."—"Infallible, then!" cried Aramis.—"During the first emotion that this resolution will cause, take care of yourself, Aramis."—"Oh, don't be afraid!"

"Now, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan to the officer, "thanks, a thousand thanks! You have made yourself three friends for life."—"Yes," added Aramis. Porthos alone said nothing, but merely bowed.

D'Artagnan, having tenderly embraced his two old friends, left Belle-Isle with the inseparable companion M. Colbert had given him. Thus, with the exception of the explanation with which the worthy Porthos had been willing to be satisfied, nothing apparently was changed in the condition of the one or of the other. "Only," said Aramis, "there is D'Artagnan's idea."

D'Artagnan did not return on board without examining to the bottom the idea he had discovered. Now, we know that when D'Artagnan did examine, he was accustomed to see

through. As to the officer, become mute again, he left him full leisure to meditate. Therefore, on putting his foot on board his vessel, moored within cannon-shot of the island, the captain of the musketeers had already got together all his means, offensive and defensive.

He immediately assembled his council, which consisted of the officers serving under his orders. These were eight in number,—a chief of the maritime forces; a major directing the artillery; an engineer; the officer we are acquainted with; and four lieutenants. Having assembled them in the chamber of the poop, D'Artagnan arose, took off his hat, and addressed them thus: "Gentlemen, I have been to reconnoitre Belle-Isle-en-Mer, and I have found in it a good and solid garrison; moreover, preparations are made for a defence that may prove troublesome. I therefore intend to send for two of the principal officers of the place that we may converse with them. Having separated them from their troops and their cannon, we shall be better able to deal with them,—particularly with good reasoning. Is this your opinion, gentlemen?"

The major of artillery rose. "Monsieur," said he, with respect, but with firmness, "I have heard you say that the place is preparing to make a troublesome defence. The place is, then, as you know, determined upon rebellion?" D'Artagnan was visibly put out by this reply; but he was not a man to allow himself to be subdued by so little, and resumed. "Monsieur," said he, "your reply is just. But you are ignorant that Belle-Isle is a fief of M. Fouquet, and the ancient kings gave the right to the seigneurs of Belle-Isle to arm their people."

The major made a movement. "Oh, do not interrupt me," continued D'Artagnan. "You are going to tell me that that right to arm themselves against the English was not a right to arm themselves against their king. But it is not M. Fouquet, I suppose, who holds Belle-Isle at this moment, since I arrested M. Fouquet the day before yesterday. Now, the inhabitants and defenders of Belle-Isle know nothing of that arrest. You would announce it to them in vain. It is a thing so unheard of and extraordinary, so unexpected, that they would not believe you. A Breton serves his master, and not his masters; he serves his master till he has seen him dead. Now, the Bretons, as I know, have not seen the body of M. Fouquet. It is not then surprising that they hold out against everything which is not M. Fouquet or his signature."

The major bowed in sign of assent. "That is why," con-

Digitized by Google

tinued D'Artagnan, "I propose to cause two of the principal officers of the garrison to come on board my vessel. They will see you, gentlemen; they will see the forces we have at our disposal; they will consequently know what they have to expect, and the fate that attends them in case of rebellion. We will assure them, upon our honour, that M. Fouquet is a prisoner, and that all resistance can be only prejudicial to them. We will tell them that when the first cannon is fired there will be no mercy to be expected from the king. Then, I hope it at least, they will no longer resist. They will yield without fighting, and we shall have a place given up to us in a friendly way which it might cost us much trouble to subdue."

The officer who had followed D'Artagnan to Belle-Isle was preparing to speak, but D'Artagnan interrupted him. "Yes, I know what you are going to tell me, Monsieur; I know that there is an order by the king to prevent all secret communications with the defenders of Belle-Isle, and that is exactly why I do not offer to communicate but in the presence of my staff." And D'Artagnan made an inclination of the head to his officers, which was intended to give a value to that condescension.

The officers looked at one another as if to read their opinions in their eyes, with the evident intention of acting, after they should have agreed, according to the desire of D'Artagnan. And already the latter saw with joy that the result of their consent would be the sending a boat to Porthos and Aramis, when the king's officer drew from his pocket a folded paper, which he placed in the hands of D'Artagnan. This paper bore upon its superscription the number "1." "What, still another!" murmured the surprised captain.—"Read, Monsieur," said the officer, with a courtesy that was not free from sadness.

D'Artagnan, full of mistrust, unfolded the paper, and read these words:—

"Prohibition to M. d'Artagnan to assemble any council whatever, or to deliberate in any way before Belle-Isle be surrendered and the prisoners shot.

(Signed) "Louis."

D'Artagnan repressed the movement of impatience that ran through his whole body, and with a gracious smile, "That is well, Monsieur," said he; "the king's orders shall be obeyed."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCL

RESULT OF THE IDEAS OF THE KING AND THE IDEAS OF D'ARTAGNAN

THE blow was direct; it was severe, mortal. D'Artagnan, furious at having been anticipated by an idea of the king, did not however yet despair; and reflecting upon the idea he had brought back from Belle-Isle, he derived from it a new means of safety for his friends. "Gentlemen," said he, suddenly, "since the king has charged some other than myself with his secret orders, it must be because I no longer possess his confidence, and I should be really unworthy of it if I had the courage to hold a command subject to so many injurious suspicions. I will go then immediately and carry my resignation to the king. I give it before you all, enjoining you all to fall back with me upon the coast of France in such a way as not to compromise the safety of the forces his Majesty has confided to me. For this purpose, return all to your posts and command the return; within an hour we shall have the flood-tide. To your posts, gentlemen! I suppose," added he, on seeing that all were prepared to obey him except the surveillant officer, "you have no orders to object, this time?"

And D'Artagnan almost triumphed while speaking these words. This plan was the safety of his friends. The blockade once raised, they might embark immediately, and set sail for England or Spain without fear of being molested. While they were making their escape, D'Artagnan would return to the king, would justify his return by the indignation which the mistrust of Colbert had raised in him; he would be sent back with full powers, and he would take Belle-Isle,—that is to say, the cage, after the birds had flown. But to this plan the officer opposed a second order of the king. It was thus conceived:—

"From the moment M. d'Artagnan shall have manifested the desire of giving in his resignation, he shall no longer be reckoned leader of the expedition, and every officer placed under his orders shall be held no longer to obey him. Moreover, the said M. d'Artagnan, having lost that quality of leader of the army sent against Belle-Isle, shall set out immediately for

France, in company with the officer who will have remitted the message to him, who will consider him as a prisoner for whom he is answerable."

Brave and careless as he was, D'Artagnan turned pale. Everything had been calculated with a depth which for the first time in thirty years recalled to him the solid foresight and the inflexible logic of the great cardinal. He leaned his head on his hand, thoughtful, scarcely breathing. "If I were to put this order in my pocket," thought he, "who would know it, or who would prevent my doing it? Before the king had had time to be informed, I should have saved those poor fellows yonder. Let us exercise a little audacity! My head is not one of those which the executioner strikes off for disobedience. We will disobey!" But at the moment he was about to adopt this plan, he saw the officers around him reading similar orders which the infernal agent of the thoughts of Colbert had just distributed to them. The case of disobedience had been foreseen as the others had been.

"Monsieur," said the officer, coming up to him, "I await your good pleasure to depart."—"I am ready, Monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, grinding his teeth.

The officer immediately commanded a canoe to receive M. d'Artagnan and himself. At sight of this D'Artagnan became almost mad with rage. "How," stammered he, "will you carry on the direction of the different corps?"—"When you are gone, Monsieur," replied the commander of the fleet, "it is to me the direction of the whole is committed."

"Then, Monsieur," rejoined Colbert's man, addressing the new leader, "it is for you that this last order that has been remitted to me is intended. Let us see your powers."—"Here they are," said the marine officer, exhibiting a royal signature.

"Here are your instructions," replied the officer, placing the folded paper in his hands; and turning towards D'Artagnan, "Come, Monsieur," said he, in an agitated voice (such despair did he behold in that man of iron), "do me the favour to depart at once."—"Immediately!" articulated D'Artagnan, feebly, subdued, crushed by implacable impossibility. And he let himself slide down into the little boat, which started, favoured by wind and tide, for the coast of France. The king's guards embarked with him. The musketeer still preserved the hope of reaching Nantes quickly, and of pleading the cause of his friends eloquently enough to incline the king to mercy. The

boat flew like a swallow. D'Artagnan distinctly saw the land of France profiled in black against the white clouds of night.

"Ah, Monsieur," said he, in a low voice, to the officer, to whom for an hour he had ceased speaking, "what would I give to know the instructions for the new commander! They are all pacific, are they not? and—"

He did not finish; the sound of a distant cannon rolled over the waters, then another, and two or three still louder. D'Artagnan shuddered. "The fire is opened upon Belle-Isle," replied the officer. The canoe had just touched the soil of France.

CHAPTER CCLI

THE ANCESTORS OF PORTHOS

When D'Artagnan had quitted Aramis and Porthos, the latter returned to the principal fort to converse with the greater liberty. Porthos, still thoughtful, was a constraint upon Aramis, whose mind had never felt itself more free.

"Dear Porthos," said he, suddenly, "I will explain D'Artagnan's idea to you."—"What idea, Aramis?"—"An idea to which we shall owe our liberty within twelve hours."—"Ah, indeed!" said Porthos, much astonished; "let us hear it."

"Did you remark in the scene our friend had with the officer that certain orders restrained him with regard to us?"—"Yes, I did remark that."—"Well, D'Artagnan is going to give in his resignation to the king; and during the confusion which will result from his absence, we will get away,—or rather, you will get away, Porthos, if there is a possibility of flight only for one." Here Porthos shook his head, and replied, "We will escape together, Aramis, or we will remain here together."

"You are a generous heart," said Aramis; "but your melancholy uneasiness afflicts me."—"I am not uneasy," said Porthos.—"Then you are angry with me?"—"I am not angry with you."—"Then why, my friend, do you put on such a dismal countenance?"—"I will tell you; I am making my will;" and while saying these words, the good Porthos looked sadly in the face of Aramis.

"Your will!" cried the bishop. "What then! do you think yourself lost?"—"I feel fatigued; it is the first time, and there is a custom in our family."—"What is it, my friend?"

"My grandfather was a man twice as strong as I am."—"Indeed!" said Aramis; "then your grandfather must have been Samson himself."—"No,—his name was Antoine. Well, he was of about my age when, setting out one day for the chase, he felt his legs weak,—he who had never before known that infirmity."—"What was the meaning of that fatigue, my friend?"—"Nothing good, as you will see,—for having set out, complaining still of the weakness of his legs, he met a wild boar, which made head against him. He missed him with his arquebuse, and was ripped up by the beast, and died directly."

"There is no reason in that why you should alarm yourself, dear Porthos."—"Oh, you will see. My father was as strong again as I am. He was a rough soldier under Henry III. and Henry IV.; his name was not Antoine, but Gaspard,—the same as M. de Coligny's. Always on horseback, he had never known what lassitude was. One evening, as he rose from table, his legs failed him."—"He had supped heartily, perhaps," said Aramis; "and that was why he staggered."—"Bah! A friend of M. de Bassompierre? nonsense! No, no; he was astonished at feeling this lassitude, and said to my mother, who laughed at him, 'Would not one believe I was going to meet with a wild boar, as the late M. du Vallon, my father, did?'"

"Well?" said Aramis.—"Well, braving this weakness, my father insisted upon going down into the garden, instead of going to bed. His foot slipped on the first stair; the staircase was steep; my father fell against a stone angle, in which an iron hinge was fixed. The hinge opened his temple, and he lay dead upon the spot."

Aramis raised his eyes to his friend. "These are two extraordinary circumstances," said he; "let us not infer that there may succeed a third. It is not becoming in a man of your strength to be superstitious, my brave Porthos. Besides, when were your legs seen to fail? Never have you been so firm, so superb; why, you could carry a house on your shoulders!"—"At this moment," said Porthos, "I feel myself pretty active; but at times I vacillate, I sink; and lately this phenomenon, as you call it, has occurred four times. I will not say that this frightens me, but it annoys me. Life is an agreeable thing. I have money, I have fine estates, I have horses that I love; I have also friends I love,—D'Artagnan, Athos, Raoul, and you."

The admirable Porthos did not even take the trouble to conceal from Aramis the rank he gave him in his friendship. Aramis pressed his hand. "We will still live many years," said

he, "to preserve in the world specimens of rare men. Trust yourself to me, my friend; we have no reply from D'Artagnan —that is a good sign. He must have given orders to get the vessels together and clear the seas. On my part, I have just issued directions that a boat should be rolled upon rollers to the mouth of the great cavern of Locmaria, which you know, where we have so often lain in wait for foxes."—"Yes, and which terminates at the little creek by a trench which we discovered the day that splendid fox escaped that way."—"Precisely. In case of misfortunes, a boat is to be concealed for us in that cavern; indeed, it must be there by this time. We will wait a favourable moment; and during the night, to sea!"

"That is a good idea; what shall we gain by it?"—"We shall gain by it that nobody knows that grotto or rather its issue, except ourselves and two or three hunters of the island, we shall gain by it that if the island is occupied, the scouts, seeing no boat upon the shore, will never imagine we can escape, and will cease to watch."—"I understand."—"Well,—the legs?"—"Oh, excellent, just now."

"You see, then, plainly that everything conspires to give us quietude and hope. D'Artagnan will clear the sea and give us liberty of action. No more royal fleet or descent to be dreaded. *Vive Dieu!* Porthos, we have still half a century of good adventures before us; and if I once touch Spanish ground, I swear to you," added the bishop, with a terrible energy, "that your brevet of duke is not remote as it now appears."—"We will live in hope," said Porthos, a little enlivened by the reviving warmth of his companion.

All at once a cry resounded in their ears: "To arms! to arms!" This cry, repeated by a hundred voices, brought to the chamber where the two friends were conversing surprise to the one and uneasiness to the other. Aramis opened the window; he saw a crowd of people running with torches. Women were seeking places of safety; the armed men were hastening to their posts.

"The fleet! the fleet!" cried a soldier, who recognised Aramis.—"The fleet?" repeated the latter.—"Within half-cannon-shot," continued the soldier.—"To arms!" cried Aramis.—"To arms!" repeated Porthos, formidably. And both rushed forth towards the pier, to place themselves within the shelter of the batteries. Boats laden with soldiers were seen approaching; they took three directions for the purpose of landing at three points at once.

Digitized by Google

"What must be done?" said an officer of the guard.—"Stop them; and if they persist, fire!" said Aramis. Five minutes after, the cannonade began. These were the shots that D'Artagnan had heard as he landed in France. But the boats were too near the pier to allow the cannon to aim correctly. They landed, and the combat began hand to hand.

"What's the matter, Porthos?" said Aramis to his friend.—"Nothing! nothing!—only my legs. It is really incomprehensible; they will be better when we charge." In fact, Porthos and Aramis did charge with such vigour, they so thoroughly animated their men, that the Royalists re-embarked precipitately without gaining anything but the wounds they carried away. "Eh! but, Porthos," cried Aramis, "we must have a prisoner, quick! quick!" Porthos bent over the stair of the pier, and seized by the nape of the neck one of the officers of the royal army who was waiting till all his people should be in the boat. The arm of the giant lifted up his prey, which served him as a buckler, as he recovered himself without a shot being fired at him.

"Here is a prisoner for you," said Porthos, coolly, to Aramis.—"Well!" cried the latter, laughing, "have you not calumniated your legs?"—"It was not with my legs I took him," said Porthos, sadly; "it was with my arms!"

CHAPTER CCLII

THE SON OF BISCARRAT

THE Bretons of the isle were very proud of this victory; Aramis did not encourage them in the feeling. "What will happen," said he to Porthos, when everybody had gone home, "will be that the anger of the king will be roused by the account of the resistance; and that these brave people will be decimated or shot when the island is taken, as it must be."—"From which it results, then," said Porthos, "that what we have done is of no use."

"For the moment it may be of some," replied the bishop, "for we have a prisoner from whom we shall learn what our enemies are preparing to do."—"Yes, let us interrogate the prisoner," said Porthos; "and the means of making him speak are very simple. We are going to supper; we will invite him to join us; when he drinks he will talk."

Digitized by Google

This was done. The officer was at first rather uneasy, but became reassured on seeing what sort of men he had to deal with. He gave, without having any fear of compromising himself, all the details imaginable of the resignation and departure of D'Artagnan. He explained how after that departure the new leader of the expedition had ordered a surprise upon Belle-Isle. There his explanations stopped. Aramis and Porthos exchanged a glance which evinced their despair. No more dependence to be placed upon the brave imagination of D'Artagnan; consequently, no more resources in the event of defeat. Aramis, continuing his interrogations, asked the prisoner what the leaders of the expedition contemplated doing with the leaders of Belle-Isle. "The orders are," replied he, "to kill during the combat, and hang afterwards."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other again, and the colour mounted to their faces. "I am too light for the gallows," replied Aramis; "people like me are not hung."—"And I am too heavy," said Porthos; "people like me break the cord."

"I am sure," said the prisoner, gallantly, "that we could have procured you the sort of death you preferred."—"A thousand thanks!" said Aramis, seriously. Porthos bowed. "One more cup of wine to your health," said he, drinking himself.

From one subject to another the chat with the officer was prolonged. He was an intelligent gentleman, and suffered himself to be led away by the charm of Aramis's wit and Porthos's cordial *bonhomie*. "Pardon me," said he, "if I address a question to you; but men who are in their sixth bottle have a clear right to forget themselves a little."—"Address it!" said Porthos; "address it!"—"Speak," said Aramis.

"Were you not, gentlemen, both in the musketeers of the late king?"—"Yes, Monsieur, and of the best of them, if you please," said Porthos.—"That is true; I should say even the best of all soldiers, Messieurs, if I did not fear to offend the memory of my father."—"Of your father?" cried Aramis.

"Do you know what my name is?"—"*Ma foi!* no, Monsieur, but you can tell us, and—"—"I am called Georges de Biscarrat."—"Oh!" cried Porthos, in his turn, "Biscarrat! Do you remember that name Aramis?"—"Biscarrat!" reflected the bishop. "It seems to me—"—"Try to recollect, Monsieur," said the officer.

"*Pardieu!* that won't take me long," said Porthos. "Biscarrat—called Cardinal—one of the four who interrupted us

the day on which we formed our friendship with D'Artagnan, sword in hand."—"Precisely, gentlemen."—"The only one," cried Aramis, eagerly, "we did not wound."—"Consequently, a good blade," said the prisoner.—"That's true! very true!" exclaimed both the friends together. "*Ma foi!* M. Biscarrat, we are delighted to make the acquaintance of such a brave man's son."

Biscarrat pressed the hands held out to him by the two former musketeers. Aramis looked at Porthos as much as to say, "Here is a man who will help us," and without delay, "Confess, Monsieur," said he, "that it is good to have been a good man."—"My father always said so, Monsieur."—"Confess, likewise, that it is a sad circumstance in which you find yourself,—falling in with men destined to be shot or hung, and learning that these men are old acquaintances, old hereditary acquaintances."—"Oh! you are not reserved for such a frightful fate as that, Messieurs and friends!" said the young man, warmly.

"Bah! you said so yourself."—"I said so just now, when I did not know you; but now that I know you, I say you will avoid this dismal fate, if you like."—"How,—if we like?" cried Aramis, whose eyes beamed with intelligence as he looked alternately at the prisoner and Porthos.—"Provided," continued Porthos, looking in his turn with noble intrepidity at M. Biscarrat and the bishop,—"provided nothing disgraceful be required of us."

"Nothing at all will be required of you, gentlemen," replied the officer; "what should they ask of you? If they find you they will kill you,—that is a settled thing; try, then, gentlemen, to prevent their finding you."—"I don't think I am mistaken," said Porthos, with dignity; "but it appears evident to me that if they want to find us, they must come and seek us here."—"In that you are perfectly right, my worthy friend," replied Aramis, constantly consulting with his looks the countenance of Biscarrat, who was silent and constrained. "You wish, M. de Biscarrat, to say something to us, to make us some overture, and you dare not,—is not that true?"

"Ah, gentlemen and friends! it is because in speaking I betray my duty. But, hark! I hear a voice which liberates mine by dominating over it."—"Cannon?" said Porthos.—"Cannon and musketry too!" cried the bishop.

On hearing at a distance among the rocks these sinister reports of a combat which they thought had ceased, "What

can that be?" asked Porthos.—"Eh, *pardieu!*" cried Aramis; "this is just what I expected."—"What is that?"—"The attack made by you was nothing but a feint,—is not that true, Monsieur? And while your companions allowed themselves to be repulsed, you were certain of effecting a landing on the other side of the island."—"Oh! several, Monsieur."—"We are lost, then," said the Bishop of Vannes, quietly.

"Lost! that is possible," replied the Seigneur de Pierrefonds; "but we are not taken or hung." And so saying, he rose from the table, went straight to the wall, and coolly took down his sword and pistols, which he examined with the care of an old soldier who was preparing for battle, and who feels that his life in a great measure depends upon the excellence and the good condition of his arms.

At the report of the cannon, at the news of the surprise which might deliver up the isle to the royal troops, the terrified crowd rushed precipitately to the fort to demand assistance and advice from their leaders. Aramis, pale and downcast, between two torches, showed himself at the window which looked into the principal court full of soldiers waiting for orders and bewildered inhabitants imploring succour. "My friends," said D'Herblay, in a grave and sonorous voice, "M. Fouquet, your protector, your friend, your father, has been arrested by an order of the king, and thrown into the Bastille." A long cry of fury and menace came floating up to the window at which the bishop stood, and enveloped him in a vibrating fluid. "Avenge M. Fouquet!" cried the most excited of his hearers, "and death to the Royalists!"

"No, my friends," replied Aramis, solemnly,—"no, my friends; no resistance. The king is master in his kingdom. The king is the mandatory of God. The king and God have struck M. Fouquet. Humble yourselves before the hand of God. Love God and the king, who have struck M. Fouquet. But do not avenge your seigneur; do not think of avenging him. You would sacrifice yourselves in vain,—you, your wives and children, your property, and your liberty. Lay down your arms, my friends; lay down your arms,—since the king commands you so to do,—and retire peaceably to your dwellings. It is I who ask you to do so; it is I who beg you to do so; it is I who now, in the hour of need, command you to do so in the name of M. Fouquet." The crowd collected under the window uttered a prolonged growl of anger and terror. "The soldiers of Louis XIV. have entered the island," continued Aramis.

"From this time it would no longer be a combat between them and you,—it would be a massacre. Go, then; go and forget. This time I command you in the name of the Lord." The mutineers retired slowly, submissive and silent.

"Ah! what have you just been saying there, my friend?" said Porthos. "Monsieur," said Biscarrat to the bishop, "you may save all these inhabitants, but you will neither save yourself nor your friend."

"M. de Biscarrat," said the Bishop of Vannes, with a singular accent of nobleness and courtesy,—"M. de Biscarrat, be kind enough to resume your liberty."—"I am very willing to do so, Monsieur; but—"—"That would render us a service, for when announcing to the king's lieutenant the submission of the islanders, you will perhaps obtain some grace for us on informing him of the manner in what that submission has been effected."

"Grace!" replied Porthos, with flashing eyes, "what is the meaning of that word?" Aramis touched the elbow of his friend roughly, as he had been accustomed to do in the days of their youth, when he wanted to warn Porthos that he had committed, or was about to commit, a blunder. Porthos understood him, and was silent immediately.

"I will go, Messieurs," replied Biscarrat, a little surprised likewise at the word "grace" pronounced by the haughty musketeer, whose heroic exploits he had just been reciting with so much enthusiasm. "Go, then, M. Biscarrat," said Aramis, bowing to him, "and at parting receive the expression of our entire gratitude."

"But you, Messieurs,—you whom I have the honour to call my friends, since you have been willing to accept that title,—what will become of you in the meantime?" replied the officer, very much agitated at taking leave of the two former adversaries of his father.—"We will wait here."—"But, *mon Dieu!* the order is formal."—"I am Bishop of Vannes, M. de Biscarrat; and they no more shoot a bishop than they hang a gentleman."—"Ah, yes, Monsieur, — yes, Monseigneur," replied Biscarrat; "it is true. You are right; there is still that chance for you. Then I will depart, I will repair to the commander of the expedition, the king's lieutenant. Adieu, then, Messieurs, or rather, *au revoir!*"

The worthy officer, then jumping upon a horse given him by Aramis, departed in the direction of the sound of the cannon, which, by bringing the crowd into the fort, had interrupted the conversation of the two friends with their prisoner. Aramis

watched his departure, and when left alone with Porthos, "Well, do you comprehend?" said he.—"*Ma foi!* no."

"Did not Biscarrat inconvenience you here?"—"No; he is a brave fellow."—"Yes; but the grotto of Locmaria,—is it necessary that all the world should know it?"—"Ah! that is true, that is true; I comprehend. We are going to escape by the cavern."—"If you please," replied Aramis, joyously. "Forward, my friend Porthos; our boat awaits us, and the king has not caught us yet."

CHAPTER CCLIII

THE GROTTO OF LOCMARIA

THE cavern of Locmaria was sufficiently distant from the pier to render it necessary for our friends to husband their strength to arrive there. Besides, the night was advancing; midnight had struck at the fort. Porthos and Aramis were loaded with money and arms. They walked, then, across the heath which is between the pier and the cavern, listening to every noise, and endeavouring to avoid ambushes. From time to time, on the road, which they had carefully left on their left hand, passed fugitives coming from the interior at the news of the landing of the royal troops. Aramis and Porthos, concealed behind some projecting mass of rock, collected the words which escape from the poor people, who fled trembling, carrying with them their most valuable effects, and tried, while listening to their complaints, to draw something from them for their own interest. At length, after a rapid course, frequently interrupted by cautious delays, they reached the deep grotto into which the foreseeing Bishop of Vannes had taken care to have rolled upon cylinders a good boat capable of keeping the sea at this fine season.

"My good friend," said Porthos, after having respired vigorously, "we are arrived, it seems. But I thought you spoke of three men,—three servants who were to accompany us. I don't see them; where are they?"—"Why should you see them, dear Porthos?" replied Aramis. "They are certainly waiting for us in the cavern, and, no doubt, are resting for a moment after having accomplished their rough and difficult task." He stopped Porthos, who was preparing to enter the cavern. "Will you allow me, my friend," said he to the giant,

" to pass in first? I know the signal I have given to these men, who, not hearing it, would be very likely to fire upon you or slash away with their knives in the dark."

" Go on, then, Aramis; go on,—go first. You are all wisdom and prudence; go on. Ah! there is that fatigue of which I spoke to you. It has just seized me again." Aramis left Porthos sitting at the entrance of the grotto, and bowing his head, he penetrated into the interior of the cavern, imitating the cry of the owl. A little plaintive cooing, a scarcely distinct cry, replied from the depths of the cave. Aramis pursued his way cautiously, and soon was stopped by the same kind of cry as he had first uttered, and this cry sounded within ten paces of him.

" Are you there, Yves? " said the bishop.—" Yes, Monseigneur; Goennec is here likewise. His son accompanies us."—" That is well. Are all things ready? "—" Yes, Monseigneur." —" Go to the entrance of the grotto, my good Yves, and you will there find the Seigneur de Pierrefonds, who is resting after the fatigues of our journey; and if he should happen not to be able to walk, lift him up, and bring him hither to me."

The three men obeyed; but the recommendation Aramis had given to his servants was useless. Porthos, refreshed, had already himself begun the descent, and his heavy step resounded among the cavities formed and supported by columns of silex and granite. As soon as the Seigneur de Bracieux had rejoined the bishop, the Bretons lighted a lantern with which they were furnished, and Porthos assured his friend that he felt as strong as ever.

" Let us visit the canoe," said Aramis, " and see in the first place what it will hold."—" Do not go too near with the light," said the skipper Yves; " for, as you desired me, Monseigneur, I have placed under the bench of the poop, in the coffer you know of, the barrel of powder, and the musket-charges that you sent me from the fort."

" Very well," said Aramis; and taking the lantern himself, he examined minutely all parts of the canoe with the precautions of a man who is neither timid nor ignorant in the face of danger. The canoe was long, light, drawing little water, thin of keel,—in short, one of those which have always been so well constructed at Belle-Isle,—a little high in its sides, solid upon the water, very manageable, furnished with planks which in uncertain weather form a sort of bridge over which the waves glide, and which protect the rowers. In two well-closed coffers placed

beneath the benches of the prow and the poop, Aramis found bread, biscuit, dried fruits, a quarter of bacon, a good provision of water in leathern bottles,—the whole forming rations sufficient for people who did not mean to quit the coast, and would be able to revictual, if necessity demanded. The arms, eight muskets and as many horse-pistols, were in good condition, and all loaded. There were additional oars, in case of accident, and that little sail called *trinquette*, which assists the speed of the canoe at the same time the boatmen row, and is so useful when the breeze is slack. When Aramis had seen all these things, and appeared satisfied with the result of his inspection, "Let us consider, Porthos," said he, "whether to endeavour to get the boat out by the unknown extremity of the grotto, following the descent and the shade of the cavern, or whether it be better to make it slide upon the rollers through the bushes in the open air, levelling the road of the little beach, which is but twenty feet high, and gives at its foot, in the tide, three or four fathoms of good water upon a sound bottom."

"It must be as you please, Monseigneur," replied the skipper, Yves, respectfully; "but I don't believe that by the slope of the cavern, and in the dark in which we shall be obliged to manœuvre our boat, the road will be so convenient as in the open air. I know the beach well, and can certify that it is as smooth as a grass-plot in a garden; the interior of the grotto, on the contrary, is rough,—without again reckoning, Monseigneur, that at the extremity we shall come to the trench which leads into the sea and which perhaps the canoe will not pass."—"I have made my calculations," said the bishop, "and I am certain it would pass."

"So be it; I wish it may, Monseigneur," the skipper insisted. "But your Greatness knows very well that to make it reach the extremity of the trench, there is an enormous stone to be lifted, —that under which the fox always passes, and which closes the trench like a door."—"That can be raised," said Porthos; "that is nothing."—"Oh! I know that Monseigneur has the strength of ten men," replied Yves; "but that is giving Monseigneur a great deal of trouble."

"I think the skipper may be right," said Aramis; "let us try the open passage."—"The more so, Monseigneur," continued the fisherman, "that we should not be able to embark before day, it would require so much labour; and that as soon as daylight appears, a good *vedette* placed outside the grotto would be necessary, indispensable even, to watch the manœuvres of

the lighters or the cruisers that are upon the look-out for us."—"Yes, yes, Yves, your reasons are good; we will go by the beach."

And the three robust Bretons went to the boat, and were beginning to place their rollers underneath it to put it in motion, when the distant barking of dogs was heard, proceeding from the interior of the island. Aramis darted out of the grotto, followed by Porthos. Dawn just tinted with purple and white the waves and the plain; through the dim light the young melancholy firs waved their tender branches over the pebbles, and long flights of crows were skimming with their black wings over the thin fields of buckwheat. In a quarter of an hour it would be clear daylight; the awakened birds joyously announced it to all nature. The barkings which had been heard, which had stopped the three fishermen engaged in moving the boat, and had brought Aramis and Porthos out of the cavern, were prolonged in a deep gorge within about a league of the grotto.

"It is a pack of hounds," said Porthos; "the dogs are upon a scent."—"Who can be hunting at such a moment as this?" said Aramis.—"And this way, particularly," continued Porthos, "this way, where they may expect the army of the Royalists."—"The noise comes nearer. Yes, you are right, Porthos, the dogs are on a scent. But, Yves!" cried Aramis, "come here! come here!"

Yves ran towards him, letting fall the cylinder which he was about to place under the boat when the bishop's call interrupted him. "What is the meaning of this hunt, Skipper?" said Porthos.—"Eh, Monseigneur, I cannot understand it," replied the Breton. "It is not at such a moment that the Seigneur de Locmaria would hunt. No; and yet the dogs—"—"Unless they have escaped from the kennel."—"No," said Goennec, "they are not the Seigneur de Locmaria's hounds."

"In common prudence," said Aramis, "let us go back into the grotto; the voices evidently draw nearer, we shall soon know what we have to expect." They re-entered, but had scarcely proceeded a hundred steps in the darkness when a noise like the hoarse sigh of a creature in distress resounded through the cavern, and breathless, running, terrified, a fox passed like a flash of lightning before the fugitives, leaped over the boat and disappeared, leaving behind it its sour scent, which was perceptible for several seconds under the low vaults of the cave.

"The fox!" cried the Bretons, with the joyous surprise of

hunters.—" Accursed chance! " cried the bishop; " our retreat is discovered."—" How so? " said Porthos; " are we afraid of a fox? "—" Eh, my friend, what do you mean by that, and why do you name the fox? It is not the fox alone, *pardieu!* But don't you know, Porthos, that after the fox come hounds, and after the hounds men? "

Porthos hung his head. As if to confirm the words of Aramis, they heard the yelping pack coming with frightful swiftness upon the trail of the animal. Six foxhounds burst out at once upon the little heath, with a cry resembling the noise of a triumph.—" There are the dogs plain enough! " said Aramis, posted on the look-out behind a chink between two rocks; " now, who are the huntsmen? "—" If it is the Seigneur de Locmaria's," replied the skipper, " he will leave the dogs to hunt the grotto, for he knows them, and will not enter in himself, being quite sure that the fox will come out at the other side; it is there he will go and wait for him."

" It is not the Seigneur de Locmaria who is hunting," replied Aramis, turning pale, in spite of his efforts to maintain a good countenance.—" Who is it, then? " said Porthos.—" Look! "

Porthos applied his eye to the slit, and saw at the summit of a hillock a dozen horsemen urging on their horses in the track of the dogs, shouting, " Tally-ho! tally-ho! "—" The guards," said he.—" Yes, my friend, the king's guards."—" The king's guards, do you say, Monseigneur? " cried the Bretons, becoming pale in their turn.—" And Biscarrat at their head, mounted upon my grey horse," continued Aramis.

The hounds at the same moment rushed into the grotto like an avalanche, and the depths of the cavern were filled with their deafening cries. " Ah, the devil! " said Aramis, resuming all his coolness at the sight of this certain, inevitable danger. " I know well we are lost, but we have at least one chance left. If the guards who follow their hounds happen to discover there is an issue to the grotto, there is no more help for us, for on entering they must see both us and our boat. The dogs must not go out of the cavern. The masters must not enter."—" That is clear," said Porthos.

" You understand," added Aramis, with the rapid precision of command; " there are six dogs which will be forced to stop at the great stone under which the fox has glided, but at the too narrow opening of which they shall be themselves stopped and killed."

The Bretons sprang forward, knife in hand. In a few minutes

Digitized by Google

there was a lamentable concert of growls and mortal howlings, and then—nothing.—"That's well!" said Aramis, coolly; "now for the masters!"—"What is to be done with them?" said Porthos.—"Wait their arrival, conceal ourselves, and kill them."

"Kill them!" replied Porthos.—"There are sixteen," said Aramis,—"at least for the time being."—"And well armed," added Porthos, with a smile of consolation.—"It will last about ten minutes," said Aramis. "To work!" And with a resolute air he took up a musket, and placed his hunting-knife between his teeth. "Yves, Goennec, and his son," continued he, "will pass the muskets to us. You, Porthos, will fire when they are close. We shall have brought down eight before the others are aware of anything, that is certain; then we all—there are five of us—will despatch the other eight, knife in hand."

"And poor Biscarrat?" said Porthos. Aramis reflected a moment. "Biscarrat first of all," replied he, coolly; "he knows us."

CHAPTER CCLIV

THE GROTTO

In spite of the sort of divination which was the remarkable side of the character of Aramis, the event, subject to the chances of things over which uncertainty presides, did not fall out exactly as the Bishop of Vannes had foreseen. Biscarrat, better mounted than his companions, arrived first at the opening of the grotto, and comprehended that the fox and the dogs were all engulfed in it. But, struck by that superstitious terror which every dark and subterraneous way naturally impresses upon the mind of man, he stopped at the outside of the grotto, and waited till his companions should have assembled round him. "Well?" asked the young men, coming up out of breath, and unable to understand the meaning of his inaction.

"Well, I cannot hear the dogs; they and the fox must be all engulfed in this cavern."—"They were too close up," said one of the guards, "to have lost scent all at once; besides, we should hear them from one side or another. They must, as Biscarrat says, be in this grotto."—"But then," said one of the young men, "why don't they give tongue?"—"It is strange!" said another.

Digitized by Google

'Well, but," said a fourth, "let us go into this grotto. Is it forbidden that we should enter it?"—"No," replied Biscarrat "only, as it looks as dark as a wolf's mouth, we might break our necks in it."—"Witness the dogs," said a guard, "who seem to have broken theirs."

"What the devil can have become of them?" asked the young men, in chorus; and every master called his dog by his name, whistled to him in his favourite note, without a single reply to either the call or the whistle. "It is perhaps an enchanted grotto," said Biscarrat. "Let us see;" and jumping from his horse, he made a step into the grotto.

"Stop! stop! I will accompany you," said one of the guards, on seeing Biscarrat preparing to disappear in the shade of the cavern's mouth. "No," replied Biscarrat,—"there must be something extraordinary in the place; don't let us risk ourselves all at once. If in ten minutes you do not hear of me, you can come in,—but then all at once."—"Be it so," said the young men, who besides did not see that Biscarrat ran much risk in the enterprise, "we will wait for you;" and without dismounting from their horses, they formed a circle round the grotto.

Biscarrat entered then alone, and advanced through the darkness till he came in contact with the muzzle of Porthos's musket. The resistance against his breast astonished him; he raised his hand and laid hold of the icy barrel. At the same instant Yves lifted a knife against the young man, which was about to fall upon him with all the force of a Breton's arm when the iron wrist of Porthos stopped it halfway. Then, like low-muttering thunder, his voice growled in the darkness, "I will not have him killed!"

Biscarrat found himself between a protection and a threat,—the one almost as terrible as the other. However brave the young man might be, he could not prevent a cry escaping him, which Aramis immediately suppressed by placing a handkerchief over his mouth. "M. de Biscarrat," said he, in a low voice, "we mean you no harm, and you must know that if you have recognised us; but at the first word, the first sigh, or the first breath, we shall be forced to kill you as we have killed your dogs."—"Yes, I recognise you, gentlemen," said the officer, in a low voice; "but why are you here; what are you doing here? Unfortunate men! I thought you were in the fort."

"And you, Monsieur,—you were to obtain conditions for us, I think?"—"I did all I was able, Messieurs; but—"—"But

what?"—"But there are positive orders."—"To kill us?" Biscarrat made no reply; it would have cost him too much to speak of the cord to gentlemen.

Aramis understood the silence of his prisoner. "M. Biscarrat," said he, "you would be already dead if we had not had regard for your youth and our ancient association with your father; but you may yet escape from the place by swearing that you will not tell your companions what you have seen."—"I will not only swear that I will not speak of it," said Biscarrat, "but I still further swear that I will do everything in the world to prevent my companions from setting foot in the grotto."

"Biscarrat! Biscarrat!" cried several voices from the outside, coming like a whirlwind into the cave.—"Reply," said Aramis.—"Here am I!" cried Biscarrat.—"Now go; we depend upon your loyalty;" and he left his hold of the young man, who hastily returned towards the light.

"Biscarrat! Biscarrat!" cried the voices, still nearer; and the shadows of several human forms projected into the interior of the grotto. Biscarrat rushed to meet his friends in order to stop them, and met them just as they were venturing into the cave. Aramis and Porthos listened with the intense attention of men whose lives depend upon a breath of air.

Biscarrat had regained the entrance to the cave, followed by his friends. "Oh, oh!" exclaimed one of the guards, as he came to the light, "how pale you are!"—"Pale!" cried another; "you ought to say livid."—"I?" said the young man, endeavouring to collect his faculties.

"In the name of Heaven, what has happened to you?" exclaimed all voices.—"You have not a drop of blood in your veins, my poor friend," said one of them, laughing.—"Messieurs, it is serious," said another. "He is going to faint, does any one of you happen to have any salts?" and they all laughed.

All these interpellations, all these jokes, crossed one another round Biscarrat as the balls cross one another in the fire of a *mêlée*. He recovered himself amid a deluge of interrogations. "What do you suppose I have seen?" asked he. "I was too hot when I entered the grotto, and I have been struck with the cold; that is all."

"But the dogs,—the dogs; have you seen them again; have you heard anything of them; do you know anything about them?"—"I suppose they have gone out by another way."

"Messieurs," said one of the young men, "there is in that

which is going on, in the paleness and silence of our friend, a mystery which Biscarrat will not or cannot reveal. Only—and that is a certainty—Biscarrat has seen something in the grotto. Well, for my part, I am very curious to see what it is, even if it were the Devil. To the grotto, Messieurs! to the grotto!"—"To the grotto!" repeated all the voices. And the echo of the cavern carried like a menace to Porthos and Aramis, "To the grotto! to the grotto!"

Biscarrat threw himself before his companions. "Messieurs! Messieurs!" cried he, "in the name of Heaven, do not go in!"—"Why, what is there so terrific in the cavern?" asked several at once. "Come, speak, Biscarrat."—"Decidedly, it is the Devil he has seen," repeated he who had before advanced that hypothesis.—"Well," said another, "if he has seen him, he need not be selfish; he may as well let us have a look at him in our turns."

"Messieurs! Messieurs! I beseech you!" urged Biscarrat.—"Nonsense! Let us pass!"—"Messieurs, I implore you not to enter!"—"Why, you went in yourself." Then one of the officers who, of a riper age than the others, had till this time remained behind and had said nothing, advanced. "Messieurs," said he, with a calmness which contrasted with the animation of the young men, "there is down there some person or something, which is not the Devil, but which, whatever it may be, has had sufficient power to silence our dogs. We must know who this some one is, or what this something is."

Biscarrat made a last effort to stop his friends; but it was useless. In vain he threw himself before the most rash; in vain he clung to the rocks to bar the passage; the crowd of young men rushed into the cave in the steps of the officer who had spoken last, but who had sprung in first, sword in hand, to face the unknown danger. Biscarrat, repulsed by his friends, not able to accompany them without passing in the eyes of Porthos and Aramis for a traitor and a perjurer, with attentive ear and still supplicating hands leaned against the rough side of a rock which he thought must be exposed to the fire of the musketeers. As to the guards they penetrated farther and farther, with cries that grew weaker as they advanced. All at once, a discharge of musketry, growling like thunder, exploded beneath the vault. Two or three balls were flattened against the rock where Biscarrat was leaning. At the same instant cries, howlings, and imprecations burst forth, and the little troop of gentlemen reappeared—some pale, some bleeding

—all enveloped in a cloud of smoke, which the outward air seemed to draw from the depths of the cavern. "Biscarrat! Biscarrat!" cried the fugitives, "you knew there was an ambuscade in that cavern, and you have not warned us! Biscarrat, you have caused four of us to be killed! Woe be to you Biscarrat!"—"You are the cause of my being wounded to death," said one of the young men, gathering his blood in his hand, and casting it into the face of Biscarrat. "My blood be upon your head!" And he rolled in agony at the feet of the young man.

"But, at least, tell us who is there!" cried several furious voices. Biscarrat remained silent. "Tell us, or die!" cried the wounded man, raising himself upon one knee, and lifting towards his companion an arm bearing a useless sword. Biscarrat rushed towards him, opening his breast for the blow, but the wounded man fell back not to rise again, uttering a groan which was his last. Biscarrat, with hair on end, haggard eyes, and bewildered head, advanced towards the interior of the cavern, saying, "You are right. Death to me, who have allowed my companions to be assassinated! I am a base wretch!" And throwing away his sword, for he wished to die without defending himself, he rushed head foremost into the cavern. The eleven who remained out of sixteen imitated his example; but they did not go farther than before. A second discharge laid five upon the icy sand; and as it was impossible to see whence this murderous thunder issued, the others fell back with a terror that can be better imagined than described. But, far from flying, as the others had done, Biscarrat remained, safe and sound, seated on a fragment of rock, and waited. There were only six gentlemen left.

"Seriously," said one of the survivors, "is it the Devil?"—"*Ma foi!* it is much worse," said another.—"Ask Biscarrat, he knows."—"Where is Biscarrat?" The young men looked around them and saw that Biscarrat did not answer. "He is dead!" said two or three voices.—"Oh, no," replied another; "I saw him through the smoke, sitting quietly on a rock. He is in the cavern; he is waiting for us."

"He must know who is there."—"And how should he know them?"—"He was taken prisoner by the rebels."—"That is true. Well; let us call him, and learn from him with whom we have to deal." And all voices shouted, "Biscarrat! Biscarrat!" But Biscarrat did not answer.

"Good!" said the officer who had shown so much coolness

Digitized by Google

in the affair. "We have no longer any need of him; here are reinforcements coming." In fact, a company of the guards, left in the rear by their officers, whom the ardour of the chase had carried away,—from seventy-five to eighty men,—arrived in good order, led by their captain and the first lieutenant. The five officers hastened to meet their soldiers; and in a language the eloquence of which may be easily imagined, they related the adventure and asked for aid. The captain interrupted them. "Where are your companions?" demanded he.—"Dead!"

"But there were sixteen of you!"—"Ten are dead. Biscarrat is in the cavern, and we are five."—"Biscarrat is then a prisoner?"—"Probably."—"No,—for here he is; look." In fact, Biscarrat appeared at the opening of the grotto. "He makes us a sign to come on," said the officer. "Come on!"—"Come on!" cried all the troop; and they advanced to meet Biscarrat.

"Monsieur," said the captain, addressing Biscarrat, "I am assured that you know who the men are in that grotto who make such a desperate defence. In the king's name I command you to declare what you know."—"Captain," said Biscarrat, "you have no need to command me. My word has been restored to me this very instant; and I come in the name of these men."—"To tell me that they surrender?"—"To tell you that they are determined to defend themselves to the death, unless you grant them good terms."

"How many are there of them, then?"—"There are two," said Biscarrat.—"There are two—and they want to impose conditions upon us?"—"There are two, and they have already killed ten of our men."

"What sort of people are they,—giants?"—"Better than that. Do you remember the history of the bastion St. Gervais, Captain?"—"Yes; where four musketeers held out against an army."—"Well, these two men were of those musketeers."—"And their names?"—"At that period they were called Porthos and Aramis. Now they are styled M. d'Herblay and M. du Vallon."—"And what interest have they in all this?"—"It is they who held Belle-Isle for M. Fouquet!"

A murmur ran through the ranks of the soldiers on hearing the two words, "Porthos and Aramis." "The musketeers! the musketeers!" repeated they. And among all these brave men, the idea that they were going to have a struggle against two of the oldest glories of the French army made a shiver, half

enthusiasm, half terror, run through them. In fact, those four names—D'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis—were venerated among all who wore a sword, as in antiquity the names of Hercules, Theseus, Castor, and Pollux were venerated.

"Two men! and they have killed ten in two discharges! That is impossible, M. Biscarrat!"—"Eh, Captain," replied the latter, "I do not say that they have not with them two or three men, as the musketeers of the bastion St. Gervais had two or three lackeys. But believe me, Captain, I have seen these men, I have been taken prisoner by them, I know them; they alone would suffice to destroy an army."—"That we shall see," said the captain, "and in a moment too. Gentlemen, attention!"

At this reply, no one stirred, and all prepared to obey. Biscarrat alone risked a last attempt. "Monsieur," said he, in a low voice, "believe me; let us pass on our way. Those two men, those two lions you are going to attack, will defend themselves to the death. They have already killed ten of our men; they will kill double the number, and end by killing themselves rather than surrender. What shall we gain by fighting them?"—"We shall gain the consciousness, Monsieur, of not having made eighty of the king's guards retire before two rebels. If I listened to your advice, Monsieur, I should be a dishonoured man; and by dishonouring myself I should dishonour the army. Forward, men!"

And he marched first as far as the opening of the grotto. There he halted. The object of this halt was to give to Biscarrat and his companions time to describe to him the interior of the grotto. Then, when he believed he had a sufficient acquaintance with the place, he divided his company into three bodies, which were to enter successively, keeping up a sustained fire in all directions. No doubt in this attack they would lose five more men, perhaps ten; but certainly they must end by taking the rebels, since there was no issue; and at any rate two men could not kill eighty.

"Captain," said Biscarrat, "I beg to be allowed to march at the head of the first platoon."—"So be it," replied the captain, "you have all the honour of it. That is a present I make you."—"Thanks!" replied the young man, with all the firmness of his race.—"Take your sword, then."—"I shall go as I am, Captain," said Biscarrat, "for I do not go to kill, I go to be killed." And placing himself at the head of the first platoon with his head uncovered and his arms crossed, "March, gentlemen!" said he.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCLV

AN HOMERIC SONG

It is time to pass into the other camp, and to describe at once the combatants and the field of battle. Aramis and Porthos had gone to the grotto of Locmaria with the expectation of finding in that place their canoe, ready moored, as well as the three Bretons, their assistants; and they at first hoped to make the boat pass through the little issue of the cavern, concealing in that fashion both their labours and their flight. The arrival of the fox and the dogs had obliged them to remain concealed. The grotto extended the space of about a hundred *toises* to a little slope dominating a creek. Formerly a temple of the Celtic divinities when Belle-Isle was still called Calonèse, this grotto had seen more than one human sacrifice accomplished in its mysterious depths. The first entrance to the cavern was by a moderate descent, above which heaped up rocks formed a low arcade; the interior, very unequal as to the ground, dangerous from the rocky inequalities of the vault, was subdivided into several compartments which commanded one another and were joined by means of several rough broken steps, fixed right and left in enormous natural pillars. At the third compartment the vault was so low, the passage so narrow, that the boat would scarcely have passed without touching the two sides; nevertheless, in a moment of despair, wood softens and stone becomes compliant under the breath of human will. Such was the thought of Aramis, when, after having fought the fight, he decided upon flight,—a flight certainly dangerous, since all the assailants were not dead, and since admitting the possibility of putting the boat to sea, they would have to fly in open day, before the eyes of the conquered, who, on discovering how few they were, would be eager in pursuit.

When the two discharges had killed ten men, Aramis, habituated to the windings of the cavern, went to reconnoitre them one by one, and counted them, for the smoke prevented seeing on beyond; and he immediately commanded that the canoe should be rolled as far as the great stone, the closure of the liberating issue. Porthos collected all his strength, and took the canoe in his arms and lifted it, while the Bretons made it run rapidly along the rollers. They had descended into the

third compartment; they had arrived at the stone which walled up the outlet. Porthos seized this gigantic stone at its base, applied his robust shoulder to it, and gave a heave which made this wall crack. A cloud of dust fell from the vault with the ashes of ten thousand generations of sea-birds, whose nests stuck like cement to the rock. At the third shock the stone gave way; it oscillated for a minute. Porthos, placing his back against the neighbouring rock, made an arch with his foot which drove the block out of the calcareous masses which served for hinges and cramps. The stone fell; and daylight was visible, brilliant, radiant, which rushed into the cavern by the opening, and the blue sea appeared to the delighted Bretons. They then began to lift the boat over the barricade. Twenty more *toises*, and it might glide into the ocean. It was during this time that the company arrived, was drawn up by the captain, and disposed for either an escalade or an assault.

Aramis watched over everything, to favour the labours of his friends. He saw the reinforcements; he counted the men; he convinced himself at a single glance of the insurmountable peril to which a fresh combat would expose them. To escape by sea at the moment the cavern was about to be invaded, was impossible. In fact, the daylight which had just been admitted to the last two compartments had exposed to the soldiers the boat rolling towards the sea, and the two rebels within musket-shot; and one of their discharges would riddle the boat if it did not kill the five navigators. Besides, supposing everything, —suppose the boat should escape with the men on board of it how could the alarm be suppressed, how could notice to the royal lighters be prevented? What could hinder the poor canoe, followed by sea and watched from the shore, from succumbing before the end of the day? Aramis, digging his hands into his grey hair with rage, invoked the assistance of God and the assistance of the Devil. Calling to Porthos, who was working alone more than all the rollers,—whether of flesh or of wood, —"My friend," said he, "our adversaries have just received a reinforcement."

"Ah, ah!" said Porthos, quietly, "what is to be done, then?"—"To recommence the combat," said Aramis, "is hazardous."—"Yes," said Porthos, "for it is difficult to suppose that out of two one should not be killed; and certainly, if one of us were killed, the other would get himself killed also." Porthos spoke these words with that natural heroism which, with him, was greater than all material forces.

Digitized by Google

Aramis felt it like a spur to his heart. "We shall neither of us be killed if you do what I tell you, friend Porthos."—"Tell me what?"—"These people are coming down into the grotto."—"Yes."—"We could kill about fifteen of them, but not more."—"How many are there in all?" asked Porthos.—"They have received a reinforcement of seventy-five men."—"Seventy-five and five, eighty. Ah, ah!" said Porthos.

"If they fire all at once they will riddle us with balls."—"Certainly they will."—"Without reckoning," added Aramis, "that the detonations might occasion fallings in of the cavern."—"Ay," said Porthos; "a piece of falling rock just now grazed my shoulder a little."—"You see, then?"—"Oh! it is nothing."

"We must determine upon something quickly. Our Bretons are going to continue to roll the canoe towards the sea."—"Very well."—"We two will keep the powder, the balls, and muskets here."—"But only two, my dear Aramis,—we shall never fire three shots together," said Porthos, innocently; "the defence by musketry is a bad one."—"Find a better, then."

"I have found one," said the giant, suddenly; "I will place myself in ambuscade behind the pillar with this iron bar; and invisible, unattackable, if they come in floods, I can let my bar fall upon their skulls thirty times in a minute. Eh! what do you think of the project? You smile!"—"Excellent, dear friend, perfect! I approve it greatly; only you will frighten them, and half of them will remain outside to take us by famine. What we want, my good friend, is the entire destruction of the troop; a single man left standing ruins us."

"You are right, my friend, but how can we attract them, pray?"—"By not stirring, my good Porthos."—"Well, we won't stir, then; but when they shall be all together—"—"Then leave it to me; I have an idea."—"If so, and your idea be a good one,—and your idea is most likely to be good,—I am satisfied."

"To your ambuscade, Porthos, and count how many enter!"—"But you, what will you do?"—"Don't trouble yourself about me; I have my work."—"I think I can hear voices."—"It is they! To your post! Keep within reach of my voice and hand."

Porthos took refuge in the second compartment, which was absolutely black with darkness. Aramis glided into the third; the giant held in his hand an iron bar of about fifty pounds weight. Porthos handled this lever, which had been used in rolling the boat, with marvellous facility. During this time,

the Bretons had pushed the boat to the beach. In the enlightened compartment, Aramis, stooping and concealed, was busied in some mysterious manœuvre. A command was given in a loud voice. It was the last order of the captain. Twenty-five men jumped from the upper rocks into the first compartment of the grotto, and having taken their ground, began to fire. The echoes growled; the hissing of the balls cut the air; an opaque smoke filled the vault.

"To the left! to the left!" cried Biscarrat, who in his first assault had seen the passage to the second chamber, and who animated by the smell of powder wished to guide his soldiers in that direction. The troop accordingly precipitated themselves to the left,—the passage gradually growing narrower. Biscarrat, with his hands stretched forward, devoted to death, marched in advance of the muskets. "Come on! come on!" exclaimed he, "I see daylight!"—"Strike! Porthos!" cried the sepulchral voice of Aramis.

Porthos breathed a sigh; but he obeyed. The iron bar fell full and direct upon the head of Biscarrat, who was dead before he had ended his cry. Then the formidable lever rose ten times in ten seconds, and made ten corpses. The soldiers could see nothing; they heard sighs and groans; they stumbled over dead bodies, but as they had no conception of the cause of all this, they came forward jostling one another. The implacable bar, still falling, annihilated the first platoon without a single sound having warned the second, which was quietly advancing. But this second platoon, commanded by the captain, had broken a thin fir growing on the shore, and with its resinous branches twisted together, the captain had made a torch.

On arriving at the compartment where Porthos, like the exterminating angel, had destroyed all he touched, the first rank drew back in terror. No firing had replied to that of the guards, and yet their way was stopped by a heap of dead bodies,—they literally walked in blood. Porthos was still behind his pillar. The captain, on lighting up with the trembling flame of the fir this frightful carnage, of which he in vain sought the cause, drew back towards the pillar behind which Porthos was concealed. Then a gigantic hand issued from the shade and fastened on the throat of the captain, who uttered a stifled rattle; his outstretched arms beating the air, the torch fell and was extinguished in blood. A second after, the corpse of the captain fell close to the extinguished torch and added another body to the heap of dead which blocked up the passage.

Digitized by Google

All this was effected as mysteriously as if by magic. On hearing the rattling in the throat of the captain, the soldiers who accompanied him had turned round; they had caught a glimpse of his extended arms, his eyes starting from their sockets, and then the torch fell and they were left in darkness. By an unreflective, instinctive, mechanical impulse the lieutenant cried, "Fire!" Immediately a volley of musketry flamed, thundered, roared in the cavern, bringing down enormous fragments from the vaults. The cavern was lighted for an instant by this discharge, and then immediately returned to a darkness rendered still thicker by the smoke. To this succeeded a profound silence, broken only by the steps of the third brigade, now entering the cavern.

CHAPTER CCLVI

THE DEATH OF A TITAN

At the moment when Porthos, more accustomed to the darkness than all these men coming from open daylight, was looking round him to see if in this night Aramis were not making him some signal, he felt his arm gently touched, and a voice low as a breath murmured in his ear, "Come,"—"Oh!" said Porthos. —"Hush!" said Aramis, still more softly.

And amid the noise of the third brigade, which continued to advance, amid the imprecations of the guards left alive, of the dying breathing their last sigh, Aramis and Porthos glided imperceptibly along the granite walls of the cavern. Aramis led Porthos into the last compartment but one, and showed him in a hollow of the rocky wall a barrel of powder weighing from seventy to eighty pounds, to which he had just attached a match. "My friend," said he to Porthos, "you will take this barrel, the match of which I am going to set fire to, and throw it amid our enemies; can you do so?"—"*Parbleu!*" replied Porthos; and he lifted the barrel with one hand. "Light it!"—"Stop," said Aramis, "till they are all massed together, and then, my Jupiter, hurl your thunderbolt among them."—"Light it," repeated Porthos.

"On my part," continued Aramis, "I will join our Bretons, help them to get the canoe to the sea, and will wait for you on the shore. Throw your barrel strongly, and hasten to us."—

Digitized by Google

"Light it," said Porthos, a third time. "But do you understand me?"—"*Parbleu!*" said Porthos, with laughter that he did not even attempt to restrain; "when a thing is explained to me, I understand it. Go, and give me the light."

Aramis gave the burning match to Porthos, who held out his arm to him to press, his hands being engaged. Aramis pressed the arm of Porthos with both his hands, and fell back to the outlet of the cavern, where the three rowers awaited him. Porthos, left alone, applied the spark bravely to the match. The spark—a feeble spark, first principle of a conflagration—shone in the darkness like a firefly, then was deadened against the match which it inflamed. Porthos enlivened the flame with his breath. The smoke was a little dispersed, and by the light of the sparkling match objects might for two seconds be distinguished. It was a short but a splendid spectacle,—that of this giant, pale, bloody, his countenance lighted by the fire of the match burning in surrounding darkness! The soldiers saw him; they saw the barrel he held in his hand; they at once understood what was going to happen. Then these men, already filled with fright at the sight of what had been accomplished, filled with terror at thinking of what was going to be accomplished, uttered together one shriek of agony. Some endeavoured to fly, but they encountered the third brigade, which barred their passage; others mechanically took aim and attempted to fire their discharged muskets; others fell upon their knees. Two or three officers cried out to Porthos to promise him his liberty if he would spare their lives. The lieutenant of the third brigade commanded his men to fire; but the guards had before them their terrified companions, who served as a living rampart for Porthos.

We have said that the light produced by the spark and the match did not last more than two seconds; but during these two seconds this is what it illumined: in the first place, the giant, enlarged in the darkness; then, at ten paces from him, a heap of bleeding bodies, crushed, mutilated, in the midst of which was still visible some last struggle of agony which lifted the mass as a last breath raises the sides of a shapeless monster expiring in the night. Every breath of Porthos, while enlivening the match, sent towards this heap of bodies a sulphurous hue mingled with streaks of purple. In addition to this principal group, scattered about the grotto as the chance of death or the surprise of the blow had stretched them, some isolated bodies seemed to threaten by their gaping wounds.

Above the ground, soaked by pools of blood, rose, heavy and sparkling, the short, thick pillars of the cavern, of which the strongly marked shades threw out the luminous particles. And all this was seen by the tremulous light of a match attached to a barrel of powder,—that is to say, a torch which, while throwing a light upon the dead past, showed the death to come.

As I have said, this spectacle did not last above two seconds. During this short space of time, an officer of the third brigade got together eight men armed with muskets, and, through an opening, ordered them to fire upon Porthos. But they who received the order to fire trembled so that three guards fell by the discharge, and the five other balls went hissing to splinter the vault, plough the ground, or indent the sides of the cavern.

A burst of laughter replied to this volley; then the arm of the giant swung round; then was seen to pass through the air, like a falling star, the train of fire. The barrel, hurled a distance of thirty feet, cleared the barricade of the dead bodies and fell amid a group of shrieking soldiers, who threw themselves on their faces. The officer had followed the brilliant train in the air; he endeavoured to precipitate himself upon the barrel and tear out the match before it reached the powder it contained. Useless devotion! The air had made the flame attached to the conductor more active; the match, which at rest might have burned five minutes, was consumed in thirty seconds, and the infernal work exploded.

Furious vortices, hissings of sulphur and nitre, devouring ravages of the fire, the terrible thunder of the explosion,—this is what the second which followed the two seconds we have described disclosed in that cavern, equal in horrors to a cavern of demons. The rocks split like planks of deal under the axe. A jet of fire, smoke, and *débris* sprang up from the middle of the grotto, enlarging as it mounted. The great walls of silex tottered and fell upon the sand; and the sand itself—an instrument of pain when launched from its hardened bed—riddled the face with its myriads of cutting atoms. Cries, howlings, imprecations, and lives,—all were extinguished in one great crash.

The first three compartments became a gulf into which fell back again, according to its weight, every vegetable, mineral, or human fragment. Then the lighter sand and ashes fell in their turns, stretching like a grey winding-sheet and smoking over these dismal remains. And now seek in this burning tomb, in this subterranean volcano,—seek for the king's guards

with their blue coats laced with silver. Seek for the officers brilliant in gold; seek for the arms upon which they depended for their defence; seek among the stones that have killed them, upon the ground that bore them. One single man has made of all this a chaos more confused, more shapeless, more terrible than the chaos which existed an hour before God conceived the idea of creating the world. There remained nothing of the three compartments,—nothing by which God could have known his own work.

As to Porthos, after having hurled the barrel of powder amid his enemies, he had fled as Aramis had directed him and had gained the last compartment, into which air, light, and sunshine penetrated through the opening. And scarcely had he turned the angle which separated the third compartment from the fourth, when he perceived at a hundred paces from him the boat dancing on the waves. There were his friends; there was liberty; there was life after victory. Six more of his formidable strides and he would be out of the vault; out of the vault, two or three vigorous springs and he would reach the canoe. Suddenly he felt his knees give way; his knees appeared powerless, his legs yielded under him. "Oh, oh!" murmured he, "there is my fatigue seizing me again! I can walk no farther! What is this?"

Aramis perceived him through the opening; unable to conceive what could induce him to stop thus, he cried, "Come on, Porthos! come on! come quickly!"—"Oh!" replied the giant, making an effort which acted upon every muscle of his body, "oh! but I cannot!" While saying these words he fell upon his knees, but with his robust hands he clung to the rocks, and raised himself up again.

"Quick! quick!" repeated Aramis, bending forward towards the shore, as if to draw Porthos to him with his arms.—"Here I am," stammered Porthos, collecting all his strength to make one step more.—"In the name of Heaven, Porthos, make haste! the barrel will blow up!"—"Make haste, Monseigneur!" shouted the Bretons to Porthos, who was floundering as in a dream.

But there was no longer time; the explosion resounded, the earth gaped, the smoke which rushed through the large fissures obscured the sky; the sea flowed back as if driven by the blast of fire which darted from the grotto as if from the jaws of a gigantic chimera; the reflux carried the boat out twenty *toises;* the rocks cracked to their base, and separated like blocks under

Digitized by Google

the operation of wedges; a portion of the vault was carried up towards heaven, as if by rapid currents; the rose-coloured and green fire of the sulphur, the black lava of the argillaceous liquefactions clashed and combated for an instant beneath a majestic dome of smoke; then at first oscillated, then declined, then fell successively the long angles of rock, which the violence of the explosion had not been able to uproot from their bed of ages; they bowed to one another like grave and slow old men, then prostrated themselves, and were embedded for ever in their dusty tomb.

This frightful shock seemed to restore to Porthos the strength he had lost; he arose, himself a giant among these giants. But at the moment he was flying between the double hedge of granite phantoms, these latter, which were no longer supported by the corresponding links, began to roll with a crash around this Titan, who looked as if precipitated from heaven amid the rocks which he had just been launching at it. Porthos felt the earth beneath his feet shaken by this long rending. He extended his vast hands to the right and left to repulse the falling rocks. A gigantic block was held back by each of his extended hands; he bent his head, and a third granite mass sank between his two shoulders. For an instant the arms of Porthos had given way, but the Hercules united all his forces, and the two walls of the prison in which he was buried fell back slowly and gave him place. For an instant he appeared in this frame of granite like the ancient angel of chaos; but in pushing back the lateral rocks, he lost his point of support for the monolith which weighed upon his strong shoulders, and the monolith, lying upon him with all its weight, brought the giant down upon his knees. The lateral rocks, for an instant pushed back, drew together again and added their weight to that of the other, which would have been sufficient to crush ten men. The giant fell without crying for help; he fell while answering Aramis with words of encouragement and hope, for, thanks to the powerful arch of his hands, for an instant he might believe that, like Enceladus, he should shake off the triple load. But by degrees Aramis saw the block sink; the hands contracted for an instant, the arms stiffened for a last effort, gave way, the extended shoulders sank wounded and torn, and the rock continued to lower gradually.

"Porthos! Porthos!" cried Aramis, tearing his hair, "Porthos! where are you? Speak!"—"There, there!" murmured Porthos, with a voice growing evidently weaker;

"patience! patience!" Scarcely had he pronounced these words, when the impulse of the fall augmented the weight! the enormous rock sank down, pressed by the two others which sank in from the sides, and, as it were, swallowed up Porthos in a sepulchre of broken stones. On hearing the dying voice of his friend, Aramis had sprung to land. Two of the Bretons followed him, each with a lever in his hand,—one being sufficient to take care of the boat. The last sighs of the valiant struggler guided them amid the ruins. Aramis, animated, active, and young as at twenty, sprang towards the triple mass, and with his hands, delicate as those of a woman, raised by a miracle of vigour a corner of the immense sepulchre of granite. Then he caught a glimpse, in the darkness of that grave, of the still brilliant eye of his friend, to whom the momentary lifting of the mass restored a moment of respiration. The two men came rushing up, grasped their iron levers, united their triple strength, not merely to raise it, but to sustain it. All was useless. The three men slowly gave way with cries of grief, and the rough voice of Porthos, seeing them exhaust themselves in a useless struggle, murmured in a bantering tone those last words which came to his lips with the last breath, "Too heavy!"

After which the eye darkened and closed, the face became pale, the hand whitened, and the Titan sank quite down, breathing his last sigh. With him sank the rock, which even in his agony he had still held up. The three men dropped the levers, which rolled upon the tumulary stone. Then, breathless, pale, his brow covered with sweat, Aramis listened, his breast oppressed, his heart ready to break. Nothing more! The giant slept the eternal sleep, in the sepulchre which God had made to his measure.

CHAPTER CCLVII

THE EPITAPH OF PORTHOS

ARAMIS, silent, icy, trembling like a timid child, arose shivering from the stone. A Christian does not walk upon tombs. But though capable of standing, he was not capable of walking. It might be said that something of Porthos, dead, had just died within him. His Bretons surrounded him; Aramis yielded to their kind exertions, and the three sailors, lifting him up, carried

Digitized by Google

him into the canoe. Then, having laid him down upon the bench near the tiller, they took to their oars, preferring to get off by rowing rather than to hoist a sail, which might betray them. Of all that levelled surface of the ancient grotto of Locmaria, of all that flattened shore, one single little hillock attracted their eyes. Aramis never removed his from it; and at a distance out in the sea, in proportion as the shore receded, the menacing and proud mass of rock seemed to draw itself up, as formerly Porthos used to do, and raise a smiling and invincible head towards heaven,—like that of the honest and valiant friend, the strongest of the four, and yet the first dead. Strange destiny of these men of brass! The most simple of heart allied to the most crafty; strength of body guided by subtlety of mind; and in the decisive moment, when strength alone could save mind and body, a stone, a rock, a vile and material weight, triumphed over strength, and falling upon the body, drove out the mind.

Worthy Porthos! born to help other men, always ready to sacrifice himself for the safety of the weak, as if God had given him strength only for that purpose. In dying he thought he was only carrying out the conditions of his compact with Aramis,—a compact, however, which Aramis alone had drawn up, and which Porthos had known only to suffer by its terrible solidarity. Noble Porthos! of what good are the châteaux filled with sumptuous furniture, the forests abounding in game, the lakes teeming with fish, the cellars gorged with wealth? Of what good are the lackeys in brilliant liveries, and in the midst of them Mousqueton, proud of the power delegated by thee? O noble Porthos! careful heaper up of treasures, was it worth while to labour to sweeten and gild life, to come upon a desert shore to the cries of sea-birds, and lay thyself with broken bones beneath a cold stone? Was it worth while, in short, noble Porthos, to heap so much gold, and not have even the distich of a poor poet engraven upon thy monument? Valiant Porthos! He still, without doubt, sleeps, lost, forgotten, beneath the rock which the shepherds of the heath take for the gigantic abode of a *dolmen*. And so many twining branches, so many mosses, caressed by the bitter wind of the ocean, so many lichens have soldered the sepulchre to the earth, that the passer-by will never imagine that such a block of granite can ever have been supported by the shoulders of one man.

Aramis, still pale, still icy, his heart upon his lips, continued his fixed gaze even till, with the last ray of daylight, the shore

faded on the horizon. Not a word escaped his lips; not a sigh rose from his deep breast. The superstitious Bretons looked at him trembling. The silence was not of a man, it was of a statue. In the meantime, with the first grey lines that descended from the heavens, the canoe had hoisted its little sail, which swelling with the kisses of the breeze, and carrying them rapidly from the coast, made brave way with its head towards Spain across the terrible gulf of Gascony, so rife with tempests. But scarcely half an hour after the sail had been hoisted, the rowers became inactive, reclined upon their benches, and making an eye-shade with their hands, pointed out to one another a white spot which appeared on the horizon, as motionless in appearance as is a gull rocked by the insensible respiration of the waves. But that which might have appeared motionless to the ordinary eyes was moving at a quick rate to the experienced eye of the sailor; that which appeared stationary on the ocean was cutting a rapid way through it. For some time, seeing the profound torpor in which their master was plunged, the sailors did not dare to rouse him, and satisfied themselves with exchanging their conjectures in low and anxious tones. Aramis, in fact, so vigilant, so active,—Aramis, whose eye, like that of a lynx, watched without ceasing, and saw better by night than by day, —Aramis seemed to sleep in the despair of his soul. An hour passed thus, during which daylight gradually disappeared, but during which also the sail in view gained so swiftly on the boat that Goennec, one of the three sailors, ventured to say aloud, "Monseigneur, we are chased!"

Aramis made no reply; the ship still gained upon them. Then, of their own accord, two of the sailors, by the direction of the skipper Yves, lowered the sail, in order that that single point which appeared above the surface of the waters should cease to be a guide to the eye of the enemy who was pursuing them. On the part of the ship in sight, on the contrary, two more small sails were run up at the extremities of the masts. Unfortunately, it was the time of the finest and longest days of the year, and the moon, in all her brilliancy, succeeded to that inauspicious day. The vessel which was pursuing the little boat before the wind had then still half an hour of twilight, and a whole night almost as light as day. "Monseigneur! Monseigneur! we are lost!" said the skipper. "Look! they see us although we have lowered our sail."—"That is not to be wondered at," murmured one of the sailors, "since they say that, by the aid of the Devil, the people of the cities have made

Digitized by Google

instruments with which they see as well at a distance as near, by night as well as by day."

Aramis took a telescope from the bottom of the boat, arranged it silently, and passing it to the sailor, "Here," said he, "look!" The sailor hesitated. "Don't be alarmed," said the bishop, "there is no sin in it; and if there is any sin, I will take it upon myself." The sailor lifted the glass to his eye, and uttered a cry. He believed that the vessel, which appeared to be distant about cannon-shot, had suddenly and at a single bound cleared the distance. But on withdrawing the instrument from his eye, he saw that, except the way which the vessel had been able to make during that short instant, it was still at the same distance.

"So," murmured the sailor, "they can see us as we see them?"—"They see us," said Aramis, and sank again into his impassiveness.—"How,—they see us?" said the skipper Yves. "Impossible!"—"Well, Skipper, look for yourself," said the sailor. And he passed to him the glass.

"Monseigneur assures me that the Devil has nothing to do with this?" asked the skipper. Aramis shrugged his shoulders. The skipper lifted the glass to his eye. "Oh, Monseigneur," said he, "it is a miracle. They are there; it seems as if I were going to touch them. Twenty-five men at least! Ah! I see the captain forward. He holds a glass like this, and is looking at us. Ah! he turns round and gives an order; they are rolling a piece of cannon forward—they are charging it—they are pointing it. *Miséricorde!* they are firing at us!"

And by a mechanical movement the skipper took the glass off, and the objects, sent back to the horizon, appeared again in their true aspect. The vessel was still at the distance of nearly a league, but the manœuvre announced by the skipper was not less real. A light cloud of smoke appeared under the sails, more blue than they, and spreading like a flower opening; then, at about a mile from the little canoe, they saw the ball take the crown off two or three waves, dig a white furrow in the sea and disappear at the end of that furrow, as inoffensive as the stone with which, at play, a boy "makes ducks and drakes." That was at once a menace and a warning.

"What is to be done?" asked the skipper.—"They will sink us!" said Goennec, "give us absolution, Monseigneur!" And the sailors fell on their knees before him. "You forget that they can see you," said he.—"That is true!" said the sailors, ashamed of their weakness. "Give us your orders, Monseigneur; we are ready to die for you."

Digitized by Google

"Let us wait," said Aramis.—"How,—let us wait?"—"Yes; do you not see, as you just now said, that if we endeavour to fly, they will sink us?"—"But perhaps," the skipper ventured to say—"perhaps by the favour of the night we could escape them."—"Oh!" said Aramis, "they probably have some Greek fire to light their own course and ours likewise."

At the same moment, as if the little vessel wished to reply to the words of Aramis, a second cloud of smoke mounted slowly to the heavens, and from the bosom of that cloud sparkled an arrow of flame, which described its parabola like a rainbow, and fell into the sea, where it continued to burn, illuminating a space of a quarter of a league in diameter. The Bretons looked at one another in terror. "You see plainly," said Aramis, "it will be better to wait for them."

The oars dropped from the hands of the sailors, and the boat ceasing to make way, rocked motionless on the summits of the waves. Night came on, but the vessel still approached nearer. It might be said it redoubled its speed with the darkness. From time to time, as a bloody-necked vulture rears its head out of its nest, the formidable Greek fire darted from its sides, and cast its flame into the ocean like an incandescent snow. At last it came within musket-shot. All the men were on deck, arms in hand; the cannoneers were at their guns, the matches were burning. It might be thought that they were about to board a frigate and to combat a crew superior in number to their own, and not to take the canoe manned by four persons. "Surrender!" cried the commander of the vessel through his speaking-trumpet.

The sailors looked at Aramis. Aramis made a sign with his head. The skipper Yves waved a white cloth at the end of a gaff. This was a way of striking their flag. The vessel came on like a racehorse. It launched a fresh Greek fire which fell within twenty paces of the little canoe, and threw a stronger light upon them than the most ardent ray of the sun could have done. "At the first sign of resistance," cried the commander of the vessel, "fire!" And the soldiers brought their muskets to the shoulder.

"Did not we say we surrendered?" said the skipper Yves.—"Living! living, Captain!" cried some excited soldiers, "they must be taken living!"—"Well, yes,—living," said the captain. Then turning towards the Bretons, "Your lives are all safe, my friends," cried he, "except the Chevalier d'Herblay."

Aramis started imperceptibly. For an instant his eye was

Digitized by Google

fixed upon the depths of the ocean enlightened by the last flashes of the Greek fire,—flashes which ran along the sides of the waves, played upon their crests like plumes, and rendered still more dark, more mysterious, and more terrible the abysses they covered. "Do you hear, Monseigneur?" said the sailors.—"Yes."—"What are your orders?"—"Accept!"

"But you, Monseigneur?" Aramis leaned still more forward, and played with the ends of his long white fingers with the green water of the sea, to which he turned smiling as to a friend. "Accept!" repeated he.

"We accept," repeated the sailors; "but what security have we?"—"The word of a gentleman," said the officer. "By my rank and by my name I swear that all but M. le Chevalier d'Herblay shall have their lives spared. I am lieutenant of the king's frigate the *Pomona*, and my name is Louis Constant de Pressigny."

With a rapid gesture Aramis,—already bent over the side of the boat towards the sea,—with a rapid gesture Aramis raised his head, drew himself up, and with a flashing eye and a smile upon his lips, "Throw out the ladder, Messieurs," said he, as if the command had belonged to him. He was obeyed. Then Aramis, seizing the rope-ladder, ascended first; but instead of the terror which was expected to be displayed upon his countenance, the surprise of the sailors of the vessel was great when they saw him walk straight up to the commander with a firm step, look at him earnestly, make a sign to him with his hand,—a mysterious and unknown sign, at the sight of which the officer turned pale, trembled, and bowed his head. Without saying a word, Aramis then raised his hand close to the eyes of the commander, and showed him the collet of a ring which he wore on the ring-finger of his left hand; and while making this sign, Aramis, draped in cold, silent and haughty majesty, had the air of an emperor giving his hand to be kissed. The commandant, who for a moment had raised his head, bowed a second time with marks of the most profound respect. Then stretching his hand out in his turn towards the poop,—that is to say, towards his own cabin,—he drew back to allow Aramis to go first. The three Bretons, who had come on board after their bishop, looked at one another, stupefied. The crew were struck with silence. Five minutes after, the commander called the second lieutenant, who returned immediately, ordering the head to be put towards Corunna. While the given order was executed, Aramis reappeared upon the deck, and took a seat

near the railing. The night had fallen, the moon had not yet risen; and yet Aramis looked incessantly towards Belle-Isle. Yves then approached the captain, who had returned to take his post in the stern, and said in a low and humble voice, "What course are we to follow, Captain?"—"We take what course Monseigneur pleases," replied the officer.

Aramis passed the night leaning upon the railing. Yves, on approaching him the next morning, remarked that, "the night must have been very humid, for the wood upon which the bishop's head had rested was soaked with dew." Who knows?—that dew was, perhaps, the first tears which had ever fallen from the eyes of Aramis! What epitaph would have been equal to that, good Porthos?

CHAPTER CCLVIII

THE ROUND OF M. DE GESVRES

D'ARTAGNAN was not accustomed to resistances like that he had just experienced. He returned profoundly irritated to Nantes. Irritation, with this vigorous man, vented itself in an impetuous attack which few people hitherto, were they king, were they giants, had been able to resist. D'Artagnan, trembling with rage, went straight to the castle, and asked to speak to the king. It might have been about seven o'clock in the morning; and since his arrival at Nantes the king had been an early riser. But on arriving at the little corridor with which we are acquainted, D'Artagnan found M. de Gesvres, who stopped him very politely, telling him not to speak too loud lest he should disturb the king. "Is the king asleep?" said D'Artagnan. "Well, I will let him sleep; but about what o'clock do you suppose he will rise?"—"Oh, in about two hours; the king has been up all night."

D'Artagnan took his hat again, bowed to M. de Gesvres, and returned to his own apartments. He came back at half-past nine, and was told that the king was at breakfast. "That will just suit me," said D'Artagnan; "I will talk to the king while he is eating." M. de Brienne reminded D'Artagnan that the king would not receive any one during his repasts. "But," said D'Artagnan, looking askant at De Brienne, "you do not know, perhaps, Monsieur, that I have the privilege of *entrée* anywhere and at any hour." De Brienne took the hand of the

captain kindly and said, "Not at Nantes, dear M. d'Artagnan; the king in this journey has changed everything."

D'Artagnan, a little softened, asked about what o'clock the king would have finished his breakfast. "We don't know."—"How! don't know,—what does that mean? You don't know how much time the king devotes to eating? It is generally an hour; and if we admit that the air of the Loire gives an additional appetite, we will extend it to an hour and a half; that is enough, I think. I will wait where I am."—"Oh, dear M. d'Artagnan, the order is not to allow any person to remain in this corridor; I am on guard for that purpose."

D'Artagnan felt his anger mounting a second time to his brain. He went out quickly, for fear of complicating the affair by a display of ill-humour. As soon as he was out he began to reflect. "The king," said he, "will not receive me,—that is evident. The young man is angry; he is afraid of the words I may speak to him. Yes; but in the meantime Belle-Isle is besieged, and my two friends will be taken or killed. Poor Porthos! As to Aramis, he is always full of resources, and I am quite easy on his account. But no, no; Porthos is not yet an invalid, and Aramis is not yet in his dotage. The one with his arm, the other with his imagination, will find work for his Majesty's soldiers. Who knows if these brave men may not get up for the edification of his Most Christian Majesty a little bastion of St. Gervais? I don't despair of it; they have cannon and a garrison. And yet," continued D'Artagnan, "I don't know whether it would not be better to stop the combat. For myself alone, I will not put up with either surly looks or treason on the part of the king; but for my friends, rebuffs, insults,—I may submit to everything. Shall I go to M. Colbert? Now, there is a man whom I must acquire the habit of terrifying. I will go to M. Colbert;" and D'Artagnan set forward bravely to find M. Colbert. He was informed that M. Colbert was working with the king at the Castle of Nantes. "Good!" cried he; "the times are returned in which I measured my steps from M. de Tréville to the cardinal, from the cardinal to the queen, from the queen to Louis XIII. Truly is it said that men in growing old become children again! To the castle, then!" He returned thither. M. de Lyonne was coming out. He gave D'Artagnan both hands, but told him that the king had been busy all the preceding evening and all night, and that orders had been given that no one should be admitted.

"Not even the captain who takes the order?" cried

Digitized by Google

D'Artagnan. "I think that he is rather too strong."—"Not even he," said M. de Lyonne.—"Since that is the case," replied D'Artagnan, wounded to the heart,—"since the captain of the musketeers, who has always entered the king's chamber, is no longer allowed to enter it, his cabinet, or his *salle à manger*,—either the king is dead or his captain is in disgrace. In either case he can no longer want him; have the kindness, then, M. de Lyonne, who are in favour, to return and tell the king plainly that I send him my resignation."

"D'Artagnan, beware of what you are doing!"—"For friendship's sake, go!" and he pushed him gently towards the cabinet. —"Well, I will go," said De Lyonne.

D'Artagnan waited, walking about the corridor. De Lyonne returned. "Well, what did the king say?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.—"He simply answered that it was good," replied De Lyonne.—"That it was good!" said the captain, with an explosion. "That is to say that he accepts it? Good! Now, then, I am free! I am only a plain citizen, M. de Lyonne. I have the pleasure of bidding you good-bye! Farewell, castle, corridor, antechamber! a citizen about to breathe at liberty takes his farewell of you."

And without waiting longer, the captain sprang from the terrace down the staircase where he had picked up the fragments of Gourville's letter. Five minutes after, he was at the hostelry where, according to the custom of all great officers who have lodgings at the castle, he had taken what was called his city chamber. But when arrived there, instead of throwing off his sword and cloak, he took his pistols, put his money into a large leather purse, sent for his horses from the castle stables, and gave orders for reaching Vannes during the night. Everything went on according to his wishes. At eight o'clock in the evening he was putting his foot in the stirrup, when M. de Gesvres appeared at the head of twelve guards in front of the hostelry. D'Artagnan saw all from the corner of his eye,—he could not fail to see those thirteen men and thirteen horses; but he feigned not to observe anything, and was about to put his horse in motion. De Gesvres rode up to him. "M. d'Artagnan," said he, aloud.—"Ah, M. de Gesvres, good-evening!"

"One would say you were getting on horseback."—"More than that, I am mounted, as you see."—"It is fortunate I have met you."—"Were you looking for me, then?"—"*Mon Dieu!* yes."—"On the part of the king, I will wager?"—"Yes."—"As I three days ago went in search of M. Fouquet?"—"Oh!"

Digitized by Google

"Nonsense! It is of no use being delicate with me,—that is all labour lost; tell me at once you are come to arrest me."—"To arrest you? Good heavens! no."—"Why do you come to accost me with twelve horsemen at your heels, then?"—"I am making my round."

"That isn't bad! And so you pick me up in your round, eh?"—"I don't pick you up; I meet you, and I beg you to come with me."—"Where?"—"To the king."—"Good!" said D'Artagnan, with a bantering air; "the king has nothing to do at last!"—"For Heaven's sake, Captain," said M. de Gesvres, in a low voice to the musketeer, "do not compromise yourself! these men hear you."

D'Artagnan laughed aloud, and replied, "March! Persons who are arrested are placed between the first six guards and the last six."—"But as I do not arrest you," said M. de Gesvres, "you will march behind with me, if you please."—"Well," said D'Artagnan, "that is very polite, Duke; and you are right in being so,—for if ever I had had to make my rounds near your *chambre de ville*, I should have been courteous to you, I assure you, by the faith of a gentleman! Now, one favour more: what does the king want with me?"

"Oh, the king is furious!"—"Very well! the king, who has taken the trouble to be furious, may take the trouble of getting calm again; that is all of that. I sha'n't die of that, I will swear."—"No, but—"—"But—I shall be sent to keep company with poor M. Fouquet. *Mordioux!* That is a gallant man, a worthy man! We shall live very sociably together, I assure you."—"Here we are at our place of destination," said the duke. "Captain, for Heaven's sake be calm with the king!"

"Ah, ah! you are playing the brave man with me, Duke!" said D'Artagnan, throwing one of his defiant glances over De Gesvres. "I have been told that you are ambitious of uniting your guards with my musketeers. This strikes me as a capital opportunity."—"God forbid that I should avail myself of it, Captain."—"And why not?"—"Oh, for many reasons,—in the first place, for this: if I were to succeed you in the musketeers after having arrested you—"

"Ah! then you admit you have arrested me?"—"No, I don't."—"Say met me, then. So, you were saying, *if* you were to succeed me after having arrested me—"—"Your musketeers, at the first exercise with ball cartridges, would all fire towards me, by mistake."—"Ah! as to that I won't say,—for the fellows do love me a little."

Digitized by Google

De Gesvres made D'Artagnan pass in first, and took him straight to the cabinet where the king was waiting for his captain of the musketeers, and placed himself behind his colleague in the antechamber. The king could be heard distinctly, speaking aloud to Colbert, in the same cabinet where Colbert might have heard, a few days before, the king speaking aloud with M. d'Artagnan. The guards remained as a mounted picket before the principal gate; and the report was quickly spread through the city that Monsieur the Captain of the Musketeers had just been arrested by order of the king. Then these men were seen to be in motion, as in the good old times of Louis XIII. and M. de Tréville; groups were formed, the staircases were filled; vague murmurs, issuing from the courts below, came rolling up to the upper stories, like the hoarse moanings of the tide-waves. M. de Gesvres became very uneasy. He looked at his guards, who after being interrogated by the musketeers who had just got among their ranks, began to shun them with a manifestation of uneasiness. D'Artagnan was certainly less disturbed than M. de Gesvres, the captain of the guards. As soon as he entered, he had seated himself on the ledge of a window, whence, with his eagle glance, he saw without the least emotion all that was going on. None of the progress of the fermentation which had manifested itself at the report of his arrest had escaped him. He foresaw the moment when the explosion would take place, and we know that his previsions were pretty correct. "It would be very odd," thought he, "if this evening my prætorians should make me King of France. How I should laugh!"

But at the height all was stopped. Guards, musketeers, officers, soldiers, murmurs, and disturbance, all dispersed, vanished, died away; no more tempest, no more menace, no more sedition. One word had calmed the waves. The king had just said by the mouth of De Brienne, "Hush, Messieurs! you disturb the king." D'Artagnan sighed. "All is over!" said he; "the musketeers of the present day are not those of his Majesty Louis XIII. All is over!"—"M. d'Artagnan to the king's apartment!" cried an usher.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCLIX

KING LOUIS XIV.

THE king was seated in his cabinet, with his back turned towards the door of entrance. In front of him was a mirror in which while turning over his papers he could see with a glance those who came in. He did not take any notice of the entrance of D'Artagnan, but laid over his letters and plans the large silk cloth which he made use of to conceal his secrets from the importunate. D'Artagnan understood his play, and kept in the background; so that at the end of a minute, the king, who heard nothing and could see only with the corner of his eye, was obliged to cry, "Is not M. d'Artagnan there?"

"I am here, Sire," replied the musketeer, advancing.—"Well, Monsieur," said the king, fixing his clear eye upon D'Artagnan, "what have you to say to me?"—"I, Sire!" replied the latter, who watched the first blow of his adversary to make a good retort; "I have nothing to say to your Majesty, unless it be that you have caused me to be arrested, and here I am."

The king was going to reply that he had not had D'Artagnan arrested, but the sentence appeared too much like an excuse, and he was silent. D'Artagnan likewise preserved an obstinate silence. "Monsieur," at length resumed the king, "what did I charge you to go and do at Belle-Isle? Tell me, if you please."

The king, while speaking these words, looked fixedly at his captain. Here D'Artagnan was too fortunate,—the king made for him so fine an opening. "I believe," replied he, "that your Majesty does me the honour to ask what I went to Belle-Isle to do?"—"Yes, Monsieur."—"Well, Sire, I know nothing about it; it is not of me that that question should be asked, but of that infinite number of officers of all kinds to whom have been given an infinite number of orders of all kinds, while to me, head of the expedition, nothing precise was ordered."

The king was wounded; he showed it by his reply. "Monsieur," said he, "orders have only been given to such as were judged faithful."—"And therefore I have been astonished, Sire," retorted the musketeer, "that a captain like myself, who rank with a marshal of France, should have found himself under the orders of five or six lieutenants or majors, good to make

spies of, possibly, but not at all fit to conduct warlike expeditions. It was upon this subject I came to demand an explanation of your Majesty, when I found the door closed against me, which, the last insult offered to a brave man, has led me to quit your Majesty's service."

"Monsieur," replied the king, "you still believe you are living in an age when kings were, as you complain of having been, under the orders and subject to the judgment of their inferiors. You appear too much to forget that a king owes an account of his actions to none but God."—"I forget nothing at all, Sire," said the musketeer, wounded by this lesson. "Besides, I do not see in what an honest man, when he asks of his king how he has ill served him, offends him."

"You have ill served me, Monsieur, by taking part with my enemies against me."—"Who are your enemies, Sire?"—"The men I sent you to fight against."—"Two men the enemies of your Majesty's army? That is incredible."—"You are not to judge of my wishes."—"But I am to judge of my own friendships, Sire."

"He who serves his friends does not serve his master."—"I have so well understood that, Sire, that I have respectfully offered your Majesty my resignation."—"And I have accepted it, Monsieur," said the king. "Before being separated from you I was willing to prove to you that I know how to keep my word."—"Your Majesty has kept more than your word, for your Majesty has had me arrested," said D'Artagnan, with his cold bantering air; "you did not promise me that, Sire."

The king would not condescend to perceive the pleasantry, and continued seriously, "You see, Monsieur, to what your disobedience has forced me."—"My disobedience!" cried D'Artagnan, red with anger.—"That is the mildest name I can find," pursued the king. "My idea was to take and punish rebels; was I bound to inquire whether these rebels were your friends or not?"—"But I was," replied D'Artagnan. "It was a cruelty on your Majesty's part to send me to take my friends and lead them to your gibbets."—"It was a trial I had to make, Monsieur, of pretended servants, who eat my bread, and ought to defend my person. The trial has succeeded ill, M. d'Artagnan."

"For one bad servant your Majesty loses," said the musketeer, with bitterness, "there are ten who have, on that same day, gone through their ordeal. Listen to me, Sire; I am not accustomed to that service. Mine is a rebel sword when I am

Digitized by Google

required to do wrong. It was wrong to send me in pursuit of two men whose lives M. Fouquet, your Majesty's preserver, had implored you to save. Still further, these men were my friends. They did not attack your Majesty; they succumbed to a blind anger. Besides, why were they not allowed to escape? What crime had they committed? I admit that you may contest with me the right of judging of their conduct. But why suspect me before the action? Why surround me with spies? Why disgrace me before the army? Why me, in whom you have to this time showed the most entire confidence,—me, who for thirty years have been attached to your person, and have given you a thousand proofs of devotedness,—for it must be said, now that I am accused; why compel me to see three thousand of the king's soldiers march in battle against two men?"—"One would say you have forgotten what these men have done to me!" said the king, in a hollow voice, "and that it was no merit of theirs that I was not lost."—"Sire, one would say that you forget I was there."

"Enough, M. d'Artagnan, enough of these dominating concerns which arise to keep the sun from my interests. I am founding a state in which there shall be but one master, as I promised you formerly; the moment is come for keeping my promise. You wish to be, according to your tastes or your friendships, free to destroy my plans and save my enemies; I will break you, or I will abandon you. Seek a more compliant master. I know full well that another king would not conduct himself as I do, and would allow himself to be dominated over by you at the risk of sending you some day to keep company with M. Fouquet and the others; but I have a good memory, and for me services are sacred titles to gratitude, to impunity. You shall only have this lesson, M. d'Artagnan, as the punishment of your want of discipline; and I will not imitate my predecessors in their anger, not having imitated them in their favour. And then, other reasons make me act mildly towards you: in the first place, because you are a man of sense, a man of great sense, a man of heart, and you will be a good servant to him who shall have mastered you; secondly, because you will cease to have any motives for insubordination. Your friends are destroyed or ruined by me. These supports upon which your capricious mind instinctively relied I have made to disappear. At this moment, my soldiers have taken or killed the rebels of Belle-Isle."

D'Artagnan became pale. "Taken or killed!" cried he.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, Sire, if you thought what you tell me, if you were sure you were telling me the truth, I should forget all that is just, all that is magnanimous in your words, to call you a barbarous king and an unnatural man. But I pardon you these words," said he, smiling with pride; "I pardon them to a young prince who does not know, who cannot comprehend, what such men as M. d'Herblay, M. du Vallon, and myself are. Taken or killed! Ah, ah, Sire! tell me, if the news is true, how much it has cost you in men and money. We will then reckon if the game has been worth the stakes."

As he spoke thus, the king went up to him in great anger and said, "M. d'Artagnan, your replies are those of a rebel! Tell me, if you please, who is King of France? Do you know any other?"—"Sire," replied the captain of the musketeers, coldly, "I remember that one morning at Vaux you addressed that question to people who did not know how to answer it, while I, on my part, did answer it. If I recognised my king on that day, when the thing was not easy, I think it would be useless to ask it of me now, when your Majesty is alone with me."

At these words, Louis cast down his eyes. It appeared to him that the shade of the unfortunate Philippe passed between D'Artagnan and himself, to evoke the remembrance of that terrible adventure. Almost at the same moment an officer entered and placed a despatch in the hands of the king, who, in his turn, changed colour while reading it. "Monsieur," said he, "what I learn here you would know later; it is better I should tell you, and that you should learn it from the mouth of your king. A battle has taken place at Belle-Isle."—"Oh! ah!" said D'Artagnan, with a calm air, though his heart beat enough to break through his chest. "Well, Sire?"—"Well, Monsieur; and I have lost a hundred and six men." A beam of joy and pride shone in the eyes of D'Artagnan. "And the rebels?" said he.—"The rebels have fled," said the king.

D'Artagnan could not restrain a cry of triumph. "Only," added the king, "I have a fleet which closely blockades Belle-Isle, and I am certain no boat can escape."—"So that," said the musketeer, brought back to his dismal ideas, "if these two gentlemen are taken—"—"They will be hanged," said the king, quietly.—"And do they know it?" replied D'Artagnan, repressing a shudder.—"They know it, because you must have told them yourself; and all the country knows it."

"Then, Sire, they will never be taken alive, I will answer for that."—"Ah!" said the king, negligently, taking up his

Digitized by Google

letter again. "Very well, they will be dead then, M. d'Artagnan, and that will come to the same thing, since I should only take them to have them hanged." D'Artagnan wiped the sweat which flowed from his brow.

"I have told you," pursued Louis XIV., "that I would one day be to you an affectionate, generous, and constant master. You are now the only man of former times worthy of my anger or my friendship. I will not be sparing of either to you, according to your conduct. Could you serve a king, M. d'Artagnan, who should have a hundred other kings, his equals, in the kingdom? Could I, tell me, do with such weakness the great things I meditate? Have you ever seen an artist effect solid work with a rebellious instrument? Far from us, Monsieur, those old leavens of feudal abuses! The Fronde, which threatened to ruin the monarchy, has emancipated it. I am master at home, Captain D'Artagnan, and I shall have servants who, wanting perhaps your genius, will carry devotedness and obedience up to heroism. Of what consequence, I ask you, of what consequence is it that God has given no genius to arms and legs? It is to the head he has given it; and the head, you know, all the rest obey. I myself am the head." D'Artagnan started. Louis XIV. continued as if he had seen nothing, although this emotion had not at all escaped him. "Now, let us conclude between us two that bargain which I promised to make with you one day when you found me very small, at Blois. Do me justice, Monsieur, when you think that I do not make any one pay for the tears of shame I then shed. Look around you: lofty heads have bowed. Bow yours, or choose the exile that will best suit you. Perhaps, when reflecting upon it, you will find that this king has a generous heart, who reckons sufficiently upon your loyalty to allow you to leave him, knowing you to be dissatisfied, and the possessor of a great state secret. You are a brave man, I know. Why have you judged me before trial? Judge me from this day forward, D'Artagnan, and be as severe as you please."

D'Artagnan remained bewildered, mute, undecided for the first time in his life. He had just found an adversary worthy of him. This was no longer trick, it was calculation; it was no longer violence, it was strength; it was no longer passion, it was will; it was no longer boasting, it was wisdom. This young man who had brought down Fouquet and could do without D'Artagnan, deranged all the somewhat headstrong calculations of the musketeer.

Digitized by Google

"Come, let us see what stops you?" said the king, kindly. "You have given in your resignation; shall I refuse to accept it? I admit that it may be hard for an old captain to recover his good-humour."—"Oh!" replied D'Artagnan, in a melancholy tone, "that is not my most serious care. I hesitate to take back my resignation because I am old in comparison with you, and I have habits difficult to abandon. Henceforward, you must have courtiers who know how to amuse you,—madmen who will get themselves killed to carry out what you call your great works. Great they will be, I feel; but if by chance I should not think them so? I have seen war, Sire; I have seen peace; I have served Richelieu and Mazarin; I have been scorched with your father at the fire of Rochelle, riddled with thrusts like a sieve, having made a new skin ten times, as serpents do. After affronts and injustices, I have a command which was formerly something, because it gave the bearer the right of speaking as he liked to his king. But your captain of the musketeers will henceforward be an officer guarding the lower doors. Truly, Sire, if that is to be the employment from this time, seize the opportunity of our being on good terms to take it from me. Do not imagine that I bear malice. No, you have tamed me, as you say; but it must be confessed that in taming me you have lessened me,—by bowing me, you have convicted me of weakness. If you knew how well it suits me to carry my head high, and what a pitiful mien I shall have while scenting the dust of your carpets! Oh, Sire, I regret sincerely, and you will regret as I do, those times when the King of France saw in his vestibules all those insolent gentlemen, lean, always swearing,—cross-grained mastiffs, who could bite mortally in days of battle. Those men were the best of courtiers for the hand which fed them,—they would lick it; but for the hand that struck them, oh, the bite that followed! A little gold on the lace of their cloaks, a little more portliness of figure, a little sprinkling of grey in their dry hair, and you will behold the handsome dukes and peers, the haughty marshals of France. But why should I tell you all this? The king is my master; he wills that I should make verses; he wills that I should polish the mosaics of his antechambers with satin shoes. *Mordioux!* that is difficult, but I have got over greater difficulties than that. I will do it. Why will I do it? Because I love money? I have enough. Because I am ambitious? My career is bounded. Because I love the court? No; I will remain because I have been accustomed for thirty years to go and take the order of the

king, and to have said to me, 'Good-evening, D'Artagnan,' with a smile I did not beg for. That smile I will beg for! Are you content, Sire?" And D'Artagnan bowed his silvered head, upon which the smiling king placed his white hand with pride.

"Thanks, my old servant, my faithful friend," said he. "As, reckoning from this day, I have no longer any enemies in France, it remains with me to send you to a foreign field to gather your marshal's bâton. Depend upon me for finding you an opportunity. In the meantime, eat of my best bread and sleep tranquilly."—"That is all kind and well!" said D'Artagnan, much agitated. "But those poor men at Belle-Isle,—one of them, in particular, so good and so brave?"—"Do you ask their pardon of me?"—"Upon my knees, Sire!"—"Well, then, go and take it to them, if it be still time. But do you answer for them?"—"With my life, Sire!"

"Go, then. To-morrow I set out for Paris. Return by that time, for I do not wish you to leave me in future."—"Be assured of that, Sire," said D'Artagnan, kissing the royal hand. And with a heart swelling with joy, he rushed out of the castle on his way to Belle-Isle.

CHAPTER CCLX

THE FRIENDS OF M. FOUQUET

THE king had returned to Paris, and with him D'Artagnan, who in twenty-four hours, having made with the greatest care all possible inquiries at Belle-Isle, had learned nothing of the secret so well kept by the heavy rock of Locmaria, which had fallen on the heroic Porthos. The captain of the musketeers only knew what those two valiant men,—what these two friends, whose defence he had so nobly taken up, whose lives he had so earnestly endeavoured to save,—aided by three faithful Bretons, had accomplished against a whole army. He had been able to see, launched on the neighbouring heath, the human remains which had stained with blood the stones scattered among the flowering broom. He learned also that a boat had been seen far out at sea, and that, like a bird of prey, a royal vessel had pursued, overtaken, and devoured this poor little bird which was flying with rapid wings. But there D'Artagnan's certainties ended. The field of conjectures was thrown open at this boundary. Now, what could he conjecture? The vessel had not returned.

It is true that a brisk wind had prevailed for three days; but the corvette was known to be a good sailor and solid in its timbers; it could not fear gales of wind, and it ought, according to the calculation of D'Artagnan, to have either returned to Brest, or come back to the mouth of the Loire. Such was the news, ambiguous, it is true, but in some degree reassuring to him personally, which D'Artagnan brought to Louis XIV. when the king, followed by all the court, returned to Paris.

Louis, satisfied with his success—Louis, more mild and more affable since he felt himself more powerful—had not ceased for an instant to ride close to the carriage door of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Everybody had been anxious to amuse the two queens, so as to make them forget this abandonment of the son and the husband. Everything breathed of the future; the past was nothing to anybody: only that past came like a painful and bleeding wound to the hearts of some tender and devoted spirits. Scarcely was the king reinstalled in Paris when he received a touching proof of this. Louis XIV. had just risen and taken his first repast, when his captain of the musketeers presented himself before him. D'Artagnan was pale and looked unhappy. The king, at the first glance, perceived the change in a countenance generally so unconcerned. "What is the matter, D'Artagnan?" said he.

"Sire, a great misfortune has happened to me."—"Good heavens! what is it?"—"Sire, I have lost one of my friends, M. du Vallon, in the affair of Belle-Isle." And while speaking these words, D'Artagnan fixed his falcon eye upon Louis XIV., to catch the first feeling that would show itself.

"I knew it," replied the king, quietly.—"You knew it, and did not tell me?" cried the musketeer.—"To what good? Your grief, my friend, is so worthy of respect! It was my duty to treat it kindly. To have informed you of this misfortune, which I knew would pain you so greatly, D'Artagnan, would have been, in your eyes, to have triumphed over you. Yes, I knew that M. du Vallon had buried himself beneath the rocks of Locmaria; I knew that M. d'Herblay had taken one of my vessels with its crew, and had compelled it to convey him to Bayonne. But I was willing that you should learn these matters in a direct manner, in order that you might be convinced that my friends are with me respected and sacred; that always the man in me will immolate himself to men, while the king is so often found to sacrifice men to his majesty and power."

"But, Sire, how could you know?"—"How do you yourself

Google

know, D'Artagnan?"—"By this letter, Sire, which M. d'Herblay, free and out of danger, writes me from Bayonne."—"Look here," said the king, drawing from a casket placed upon the table close to the seat upon which D'Artagnan was leaning a letter copied exactly from that of M. d'Herblay; "here is the very letter which Colbert placed in my hands a week before you received yours. I am well served, you may perceive."

"Yes, Sire," murmured the musketeer; "you were the only man whose fortune was capable of dominating the fortunes and strength of my two friends. You have used it, Sire; but you will not abuse it, will you?"—"D'Artagnan," said the king, with a smile beaming with kindness, "I could have M. d'Herblay carried off from the territories of the King of Spain, and brought here alive to inflict justice upon him. But, D'Artagnan, be assured I will not yield to this first and natural impulse. He is free; let him continue free."

"Oh, Sire! you will not always remain so clement, so noble, so generous as you have shown yourself with respect to me and M. d'Herblay; you will have about you councillors who will cure you of that weakness."—"No, D'Artagnan, you are mistaken when you accuse my council of urging me to pursue rigorous measures. The advice to spare M. d'Herblay comes from Colbert himself."—"Oh, Sire!" said D'Artagnan, extremely surprised.

"As for you," continued the king, with a kindness very uncommon with him, "I have several pieces of good news to announce to you; but you shall know them, my dear Captain, the moment I have finished my accounts. I have said that I wish to make, and would make, your fortune; that promise will soon be a reality."

"A thousand times thanks, Sire! I can wait. But I implore you, while I go and practise patience, that your Majesty will deign to notice those poor people who have for so long a time besieged your antechamber, and come humbly to lay a petition at your feet."—"Who are they?"—"Enemies of your Majesty." The king raised his head. "Friends of M. Fouquet," added D'Artagnan.—"Their names?"—"M. Gourville, M. Pellisson, and a poet, M. Jean de la Fontaine."

The king took a moment to reflect. "What do they want?"—"I do not know."—"How do they appear?"—"In great affliction."—"What do they say?"—"Nothing."—"What do they do?"—"They weep."—"Let them come in," said the king, with a serious brow. D'Artagnan turned rapidly on his

heel, raised the tapestry which closed the entrance to the royal chamber, and directing his voice to the adjoining room, cried, "Introduce!"

The three men D'Artagnan had named soon appeared at the door of the cabinet in which were the king and his captain. A profound silence prevailed. The courtiers, at the approach of the friends of the unfortunate superintendent of the finances, drew back, as if fearful of being soiled by contact with disgrace and misfortune. D'Artagnan, with a quick step, came forward to take by the hand the unhappy men who stood hesitating and trembling at the door of the cabinet; he led them up to the arm-chair of the king, who, having placed himself in the embrasure of a window, awaited the moment of presentation, and was preparing himself to give the supplicants a rigorously diplomatic reception.

The first of the friends of Fouquet that advanced was Pellisson. He did not weep, but his tears were only restrained that the king might the better hear his voice and his prayer. Gourville bit his lips to check his tears, out of respect for the king. La Fontaine buried his face in his handkerchief, and the only signs of life he gave were the convulsive motions of his shoulders, raised by his sobs. The king had preserved all his dignity. His countenance was impassive. He even maintained the frown which had appeared when D'Artagnan had announced his enemies to him. He made a gesture which signified, "Speak;" and he remained standing, with his eyes searchingly fixed upon these desponding men. Pellisson bowed down to the ground, and La Fontaine knelt as people do in churches. This obstinate silence, disturbed only by such dismal sighs and groans, began to excite in the king, not compassion, but impatience.

"M. Pellisson," said he, in a sharp dry tone, "M. Gourville, and you, Monsieur,"—and he did not name La Fontaine,—"I cannot, without sensible displeasure, see you come to plead for one of the greatest criminals that it is the duty of my justice to punish. A king does not allow himself to be softened but by tears or by remorse,—the tears of the innocent, the remorse of the guilty. I have no faith either in the remorse of M. Fouquet or the tears of his friends, because the one is tainted to the very heart, and the others ought to dread coming to offend me in my own palace. For these reasons, I beg you, M. Pellisson, M. Gourville, and you, Monsieur, to say nothing that will not plainly proclaim the respect you have for my will."

"Sire," replied Pellisson, trembling at these terrible words,

" we are come to say nothing to your Majesty that is not the most profound expression of the most sincere respect and love which are due to a king from all his subjects. Your Majesty's justice is unquestionable; every one must yield to the sentences it pronounces. We respectfully bow before it. Far from us be the idea of coming to defend him who has had the misfortune to offend your Majesty. He who has incurred your displeasure may be a friend of ours, but he is an enemy to the State. We abandon him, but with tears, to the severity of the king."

" Besides," interrupted the king, calmed by that supplicating voice and those persuasive words, " my parliament will decide. I do not strike without having weighed the crime; my justice does not wield the sword without having employed the scales." —" Therefore have we every confidence in that impartiality of the king, and hope to make our feeble voices heard, with the consent of your Majesty, when the hour for defending an accused friend shall strike for us."—" In that case, Messieurs, what do you ask of me? " said the king, with his most imposing air.

" Sire," continued Pellisson, " the accused leaves a wife and a family. The little property he had was scarcely sufficient to pay his debts, and Madame Fouquet since the captivity of her husband is abandoned by everybody. The hand of your Majesty strikes like the hand of God. When the Lord sends the curse of leprosy or pestilence into a family, every one flies and shuns the abode of the leprous or the plague-stricken. Sometimes, but very rarely, a generous physician alone ventures to approach the accursed threshold, passes it with courage, and exposes his life to combat death. He is the last resource of the dying; he is the instrument of heavenly mercy. Sire, we supplicate you with clasped hands and bended knees, as the Deity is supplicated! Madame Fouquet has no longer any friends, no longer any support; she weeps in her poor deserted house, abandoned by all those who besieged its doors in the hour of prosperity; she has neither credit nor hope left. At least, the unhappy wretch upon whom your anger falls receives from you, however culpable he may be, the daily bread which is moistened by his tears. As much afflicted, more destitute than her husband, Madame Fouquet—she who had the honour to receive your Majesty at her table; Madame Fouquet, the wife of the ancient superintendent of your Majesty's finances,—Madame Fouquet has no longer bread."

Here the mortal silence which enchained the breath of Pellisson's two friends was broken by an outburst of sobs; and

D'Artagnan, whose chest heaved at hearing this humble prayer, turned round towards the corner of the cabinet to bite his moustache and conceal his sighs. The king had kept his eye dry and his countenance severe; but the colour had mounted to his cheeks, and the firmness of his look was visibly diminished. "What do you wish?" said he, in an agitated voice.—"We come humbly to ask your Majesty," replied Pellisson, upon whom emotion was fast gaining, "to permit us, without incurring the displeasure of your Majesty, to lend to Madame Fouquet two thousand pistoles collected among the old friends of her husband, in order that the widow may not stand in need of the necessaries of life."

At the word "widow," pronounced by Pellisson while Fouquet was still alive, the king turned very pale. His pride fell; pity rose from his heart to his lips. He cast a softened look upon the men who knelt sobbing at his feet. "God forbid," said he, "that I should confound the innocent with the guilty! They know me but ill who doubt my mercy towards the weak. I strike none but the arrogant. Do, Messieurs, do all that your hearts counsel you to assuage the grief of Madame Fouquet. Go, Messieurs; go!" The three men arose in silence with dried eyes. The tears had been dried up by contact with their burning cheeks and eyelids. They had not the strength to address their thanks to the king, who himself cut short their solemn reverences by entrenching himself suddenly behind the arm-chair.

D'Artagnan remained alone with the king. "Well!" said he, approaching the young prince, who interrogated him with his look,—"well, my master! If you had not the device which your sun adorns, I would recommend you one which M. Conrart should translate into Latin, 'Mild with the lowly! rough with the strong.'" The king smiled and passed into the next apartment after having said to D'Artagnan, "I give you the leave of absence you must want to put in order the affairs of your friend, the late M. du Vallon."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCLXI

PORTHOS'S WILL

At Pierrefonds everything was in mourning. The courts were deserted, the stables closed, the parterres neglected. In the basins, the fountains, formerly so spreading, noisy, and sparkling, had stopped of themselves. Along the roads around the château came a few grave personages mounted upon mules or farm horses. These were country neighbours, curés, and bailiffs of adjacent estates. All these people entered the château silently, gave their horses to a melancholy-looking groom, and directed their steps, conducted by a huntsman in black, to the great dining-room, where Mousqueton received them at the door. Mousqueton had become so thin in two days that his clothes moved upon him like sheaths which are too large, in which the blades of swords dance about at each motion. His face, composed of red and white, like that of the Madonna of Vandyke, was furrowed by two silver rivulets which had dug their beds in his cheeks, as full formerly as they had become thin since his grief began. At each fresh arrival Mousqueton shed fresh tears, and it was pitiful to see him press his throat with his fat hand to keep from bursting into sobs and lamentations. All these visits were for the purpose of hearing the reading of Porthos's will, announced for that day, and at which all the covetous and all who were allied by friendship with the deceased were anxious to be present, as he had left no relative behind him.

The visitors took their places as they arrived; and the great room had just been closed when the clock struck twelve, the hour fixed for the reading. Porthos's procurator—who was naturally the successor of Master Coquenard—began by slowly unfolding the vast parchment upon which the powerful hand of Porthos had traced his last wishes. The seal broken, the spectacles put on, the preliminary cough having sounded, every one opened his ears. Mousqueton had squatted himself in a corner, the better to weep and the less to hear. All at once the folding-doors of the great room, which had been shut, were thrown open as if by miracle, and a manly figure appeared upon the threshold, resplendent in the full light of the sun. This was D'Artagnan, who had come alone to the gate, and finding nobody

Digitized by Google

to hold his stirrup, had tied his horse to a knocker and announced himself. The splendour of the daylight invading the room, the murmur of all present, and more than all that the instinct of the faithful dog drew Mousqueton from his reverie; he raised his head, recognised the old friend of his master, and crying out with grief, embraced the captain's knees, watering the floor with tears. D'Artagnan raised up the poor intendant, embraced him as if he had been a brother, and having nobly saluted the assembly, who all bowed as they whispered to one another his name, went and took his seat at the extremity of the great carved oak hall, still holding by the hand poor Mousqueton, who was suffocating and sank down upon the steps. Then the procurator, who, like the rest, was considerably agitated, began the reading.

Porthos, after a profession of faith of the most Christian character, asked pardon of his enemies for all the injuries he might have done them. At this paragraph, a ray of inexpressible pride beamed from the eyes of D'Artagnan. He recalled to his mind the old soldier, all those enemies of Porthos brought to the earth by his valiant hand; he reckoned up the numbers of them, and said to himself that Porthos had acted wisely not to detail his enemies or the injuries done to them, or the task would have been too much for the reader. Then came the following enumeration:—

"I possess at this present time, by the grace of God—

"1. The domain of Pierrefonds, lands, woods, meadows, waters, and forests, surrounded by good walls.

"2. The domain of Bracieux, château, forests, ploughed lands, forming three farms.

"3. The little estate Du Vallon, so named because it is in the valley. [Brave Porthos!]

"4. Fifty farms in Touraine, amounting to five hundred acres.

"5. Three mills upon the Cher, bringing in six hundred livres each.

"6. Three fish-pools in Berry, producing two hundred livres a year.

"As to my personal or movable property, so called because it cannot be moved, as is so well explained by my learned friend the Bishop of Vannes [D'Artagnan shuddered at the dismal remembrance attached to that name. The procurator continued imperturbably], they consist—

"1. In goods which I cannot detail here for want of room,

Digitized by Google

and which furnish all my châteaux, or houses, but of which the list is drawn up by my intendant."

Every one turned his eyes towards Mousqueton, who was absorbed in his grief.

"2. In twenty horses for saddle and draught, which I have particularly at my château of Pierrefonds, and which are called Bayard, Roland, Charlemagne, Pépin, Dunois, La Hire, Ogier, Samson, Milon, Nemrod, Urgande Armide, Falstrade, Dalila, Rebecca, Yolande, Finette, Grisette, Lisette, and Musette.

"3. In sixty dogs, forming six packs, divided as follows: the first, for the stag; the second, for the wolf; the third, for the wild boar; the fourth, for the hare; and the two others, for watch and guard.

"4. In arms for war and the chase, contained in my gallery of arms.

"5. My wines of Anjou, selected for Athos, who liked them formerly; my wines of Burgundy, Champagne, Bordeaux, and Spain, stocking eight cellars and twelve vaults in my various houses.

"6. My pictures and statues, which are said to be of great value and which are sufficiently numerous to fatigue the sight.

"7. My library, consisting of six thousand volumes, quite new, which have never been opened.

"8. My silver plate, which perhaps is a little worn, but which ought to weigh from a thousand to twelve hundred pounds, for I had great trouble in lifting the coffer that contained it, and could not carry it more than six times round my chamber.

"9. All these objects, in addition to the table and house linen, are divided in the residences I liked the best."

Here the reader stopped to take breath. Every one sighed, coughed, and redoubled his attention. The procurator resumed:—

"I have lived without having any children, and it is probable I never shall have any, which to me is a cutting grief. And yet I am mistaken, for I have a son, in common with my other friends: he is M. Raoul Auguste Jules de Bragelonne, the true son of M. le Comte de la Fère.

"This young nobleman has appeared to me worthy to succeed to the three valiant gentlemen of whom I am the friend and the very humble servant."

Digitized by Google

Here a sharp sound interrupted the reader. It was D'Artagnan's sword, which, slipping from his baldric, had fallen on the sonorous flooring. Every one turned his eyes that way, and saw that a large tear had rolled from the thick lid of D'Artagnan upon his aquiline nose, the luminous edge of which shone like a crescent enlightened by the sun. The procurator continued:—

"This is why I have left all my property, movable or immovable, comprised in the above enumerations, to M. le Vicomte Raoul Auguste Jules de Bragelonne, son of M. le Comte de la Fère, to console him for the grief he seems to suffer, and enable him to support his name gloriously."

A long murmur ran through the auditory. The procurator continued, seconded by the flashing eye of D'Artagnan, which, glancing over the assembly, quickly restored the interrupted silence:—

"On condition that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne do give to M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of the king's musketeers, whatever the said Chevalier d'Artagnan may demand of my property. On condition that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne do pay a good pension to M. le Chevalier d'Herblay, my friend, if he should be compelled to live in exile. I leave to my intendant Mousqueton all my clothes, of city, war, or chase, to the number of forty-seven suits, with the assurance that he will wear them till they are worn out, for the love of, and in remembrance of his master. Moreover, I bequeath to M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne my old servant and faithful friend, Mousqueton, already named, with the charge to the said viscount that he shall so act that Mousqueton shall declare when dying that he has never ceased to be happy."

On hearing these words, Mousqueton bowed, pale and trembling; his large shoulders shook convulsively; his countenance, impressed by a frightful grief, appeared from between his icy hands, and the spectators saw him stagger and hesitate, as if, though wishing to leave the hall, he did not know the way.

"Mousqueton, my good friend," said D'Artagnan, "go and make your preparations. I will take you with me to Athos's house, whither I shall go on leaving Pierrefonds." Mousqueton made no reply. He scarcely breathed, feeling as if everything in that hall would from that time be strange to him. He opened the door, and disappeared slowly.

The procurator finished his reading, after which the greater

Digitized by Google

part of those who had come to hear the last will of Porthos dispersed by degrees, many disappointed, but all penetrated with respect. As for D'Artagnan, left alone after having received the formal compliments of the procurator, he was lost in admiration of the wisdom of the testator, who had so judiciously bestowed his wealth upon the most necessitous and the most worthy, with a delicacy that none among the most refined courtiers and the most noble hearts could have displayed more becomingly. When Porthos enjoined Raoul de Bragelonne to give to D'Artagnan all he would ask, he knew well, did that worthy Porthos, that D'Artagnan would ask or take nothing; and in case he did demand anything, none but himself could say what. Porthos left a pension to Aramis, who, if he should be inclined to ask too much, would be checked by the example of D'Artagnan; and that word "exile," thrown out by the testator without apparent intention,—was it not the most mild, the most exquisite criticism upon that conduct of Aramis which had brought about the death of Porthos? But there was no mention of Athos in the testament of the dead; could the latter for a moment suppose that the son would not offer the best part to the father? The rough mind of Porthos had judged all these causes, caught all these shades, better than a law, better than custom, better than taste.

"Porthos was a heart," said D'Artagnan to himself, with a sigh. As he made this reflection he fancied he heard a groan in the room above him, and he thought immediately of poor Mousqueton, whom it was necessary to divert from his grief. For this purpose he left the hall hastily to seek the worthy intendant. He ascended the staircase leading to the first story, and perceived in Porthos's own chamber a heap of clothes of all colours and all materials, upon which Mousqueton had laid himself down after heaping them together. It was the legacy of the faithful friend. These clothes were truly his own; they had been given to him. The hand of Mousqueton was stretched over these relics, which he kissed with all his lips, with all his face, which he covered with his whole body. D'Artagnan approached to console the poor fellow. "My God!" said he; "he does not stir,—he has fainted!" But D'Artagnan was mistaken; Mousqueton was dead,—dead, like the dog who having lost his master, comes back to die upon his cloak.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER CCLXII

THE OLD AGE OF ATHOS

WHILE all these affairs were separating for ever the four musketeers, formerly bound together in a manner that seemed indissoluble, Athos, left alone after the departure of Raoul, began to pay his tribute to that death by anticipation which is called the absence of those we love. Returned to his house at Blois, no longer having even Grimaud to receive a poor smile when he passed through the parterre, Athos daily felt the decline of the vigour of a nature which for so long a time had appeared infallible. Age, which had been kept back by the presence of the beloved object, arrived with that *cortége* of pains and inconveniences which increases in proportion as its coming is delayed. Athos had no longer his son's presence to incite him to walk firmly, with his head erect, as a good example; he had no longer in those brilliant eyes of the young man an ever-ardent focus at which to rekindle the fire of his looks. And then, it must be said, this nature, exquisite in its tenderness and its reserve, no longer finding anything that comprehended its feelings, gave itself up to grief with all the warmth with which vulgar natures give themselves up to joy. The Comte de la Fère, who had remained a young man up to his sixty-second year; the warrior who had preserved his strength in spite of fatigues, his freshness of mind in spite of misfortunes, his mild serenity of soul and body in spite of Milady, in spite of Mazarin, in spite of La Vallière,—Athos had become an old man in a week from the moment at which he had lost the support of his latter youth. Still handsome though bent, noble but sad,—gently, and tottering under his grey hairs, he sought since his solitude the glades where the rays of the sun penetrated through the foliage of the walks. He discontinued all the vigorous exercises he had enjoyed through life, since Raoul was no longer with him. The servants, accustomed to see him stirring with the dawn at all seasons, were astonished to hear seven o'clock strike before their master had quitted his bed. Athos remained in bed with a book under his pillow; but he did not sleep, neither did he read. Remaining in bed that he might no longer have to carry his body, he allowed his soul and

Digitized by Google

spirit to wander from their envelope, and return to his son or to God.

His people were sometimes terrified to see him for hours together absorbed in a silent reverie, mute and insensible; he no longer heard the timid step of the servant who came to the door of his chamber to watch the sleeping or waking of his master. It sometimes happened that he forgot that the day had half passed away, that the hours for the first two meals were gone by. Then he was awakened. He rose, descended to his shady walk, then came out a little into the sun, as if to partake its warmth for a minute with his absent child; and then the dismal, monotonous walk was resumed, until, quite exhausted, he regained the chamber and the bed,—his domicile by choice. For several days the count did not speak a word; he refused to receive the visits that were paid him, and during the night he was seen to relight his lamp and pass long hours in writing letters or examining parchments.

Athos wrote one of these letters to Vannes, another to Fontainebleau; they remained without answers. We know why. Aramis had quitted France, and D'Artagnan was travelling from Nantes to Paris, from Paris to Pierrefonds. Athos's *valet de chambre* observed that he shortened his walk every day by several turns. The great alley of limes soon became too long for feet that used to traverse it a hundred times in a day. The count walked feebly as far as the middle trees, seated himself upon a mossy bank which sloped towards a side path, and there waited the return of his strength, or rather the return of night. Very shortly a hundred steps exhausted him. At length Athos refused to rise at all; he declined all nourishment, and his terrified people,—although he did not complain, although he had a smile on his lips, although he continued to speak with his sweet voice,—his people went to Blois in search of the old physician of the late Monsieur, and brought him to the Comte de la Fère in such a fashion that he could see the count without being himself seen. For this purpose they placed him in a closet adjoining the chamber of the patient, and implored him not to show himself, in the fear of displeasing their master, who had not asked for a physician. The doctor obeyed: Athos was a sort of model for the gentlemen of the country; the Blaisois boasted of possessing this sacred relic of the old French glories. Athos was a great seigneur, compared with such nobles as the king improvised by touching with his yellow and prolific sceptre the dry trunks of the heraldic trees of the province.

People respected Athos, we say, and they loved him. The physician could not bear to see his people weep, and to see flock round him the poor of the canton, to whom Athos gave life and consolation by his kind words and his charities. He examined, therefore, from the depths of his hiding-place, the nature of that mysterious malady which bent down and devoured more mortally every day a man but lately so full of life and of a desire to live. He remarked upon the cheeks of Athos the purple of fever, which fires itself and feeds itself,—slow fever, pitiless, born in a fold of the heart, sheltering itself behind that rampart, growing from the suffering it engenders, at once cause and effect of a perilous situation. The count spoke to nobody, we say; he did not even talk to himself. His thought feared noise; it approached to that degree of over-excitement which borders upon ecstasy. Man thus absorbed, though he does not yet belong to God, already belongs no longer to earth. The doctor remained for several hours studying this painful struggle of the will against a superior power; he was terrified at seeing those eyes always fixed, always directed towards an invisible object, at seeing beat with the same movement that heart from which never a sigh arose to vary the melancholy state. Sometimes the acuteness of pain awakens hope in the mind of a physician. Half a day passed away thus. The doctor formed his resolution like a brave man, like a man of firm mind; he issued suddenly from his place of retreat, and went straight up to Athos, who saw him without evincing more surprise than if he had not perceived the apparition. "Monsieur the Count, I crave your pardon," said the doctor, coming up to the patient with open arms; "but I have a reproach to make you. You shall hear me." And he seated himself by the pillow of Athos, who with difficulty roused himself from his preoccupation. "What is the matter, Doctor?" asked the count, after a silence.

"Why, the matter is, you are ill, Monsieur, and have had no advice."—"I! ill!" said Athos, smiling.—"Fever, consumption, weakness, decay, Monsieur the Count."—"Weakness!" replied Athos; "is that possible? I do not get up."

"Come, come, Monsieur the Count, no subterfuges; you are a good Christian?"—"I hope so," said Athos.—"Would you kill yourself?"—"Never, Doctor."—"Well, Monsieur, you are in a fair way of doing so; to remain thus is suicide. Get well, Monsieur the Count! get well!"

"Of what? Find the disease first. For my part, I never

Digitized by Google

knew myself better. Never did the sky appear more blue to me; never did I value more my flowers."—"You have a concealed grief."—"Concealed! not at all. I have the absence of my son, Doctor,—that is my malady, and I do not conceal it."—"Monsieur the Count, your son lives, he is strong, he has all the future before him of men of his merit and of his race; live for him—"—"But I do live, Doctor; oh! be satisfied of that," added he, with a melancholy smile. "As long as Raoul lives, it will be plainly known,—for as long as he lives, I shall live."

"What do you say?"—"A very simple thing. At this moment, Doctor, I allow my life to be in a state of suspense. A forgetful, dissipated, indifferent life would be above my strength now that I have Raoul no longer with me. You do not ask the lamp to burn when the spark has not lighted the flame; do not ask me to live noisily and brilliantly. I vegetate, I prepare myself, I wait. Look, Doctor; you remember those soldiers we have so often seen together at the ports, where they were waiting to embark,—lying down, indifferent, half upon one element, half upon the other. They were neither at the place where the sea was going to carry them nor at the place where the earth was going to lose them; baggage prepared, minds upon the stretch, looks fixed,—they waited. I repeat that word; it is the one which describes my present life. Lying down, like the soldiers, my ear on the alert for the reports that may reach me, I wish to be ready to set out at the first summons. Who will make me that summons,—life or death, God or Raoul? My baggage is packed; my soul is prepared; I await the signal. I wait, Doctor, I wait!"

The doctor knew the temper of that mind; he appreciated the strength of that body. He reflected for a moment, told himself that words were useless, remedies absurd; and he left the château, exhorting Athos's servants not to leave him for a moment.

The doctor being gone, Athos evinced neither anger nor vexation at having been disturbed. He did not even desire that all letters that came should be brought to him directly. He knew very well that every distraction which should arrive would be a joy, a hope, which his servants would have paid with their blood to procure him. Sleep had become rare. By force of thought, Athos forgot himself, for a few hours at most, in a reverie more profound, more obscure than other people would have called a reverie. The momentary repose which this forgetfulness afforded the body, fatigued the soul,—for Athos lived

a double life during these wanderings of his understanding. One night, he dreamed that Raoul was dressing himself in a tent to go upon an expedition commanded by M. de Beaufort in person. The young man was sad; he clasped his cuirass slowly, and slowly he girded on his sword. "What is the matter?" asked his father, tenderly.—"What afflicts me is the death of Porthos, our so dear friend," replied Raoul. "I suffer here for the grief you will feel at home."

And the vision disappeared with the slumber of Athos. At daybreak one of his servants entered his master's apartments, and gave him a letter which came from Spain. "The writing of Aramis," thought the count; and he read. "Porthos is dead!" cried he, after the first lines. "Oh, Raoul, Raoul, thanks! thou keepest thy promise, thou warnest me!" And Athos, seized with a mortal sweat, fainted in his bed, without any other cause than his weakness.

CHAPTER CCLXIII

THE VISION OF ATHOS

When this fainting of Athos had ceased, the count, almost ashamed of having given way before this supernatural event, dressed himself and ordered his horse, determined to ride to Blois to open more certain correspondence with either Raoul, D'Artagnan, or Aramis. In fact, this letter from Aramis informed the Comte de la Fère of the bad success of the expedition of Belle-Isle. It gave him sufficient details of the death of Porthos to move the tender and devoted heart of Athos to its last fibres. Athos wished to go and pay his friend Porthos a last visit. To render this honour to his companion in arms, he meant to send to D'Artagnan, to prevail upon him to recommence the painful voyage to Belle-Isle, to accomplish in his company that sad pilgrimage to the tomb of the giant he had so much loved; then he would return to his dwelling to obey that secret influence which was conducting him to eternity by a mysterious road. But scarcely had his joyous servants dressed their master, whom they saw with pleasure preparing himself for a journey which might dissipate his melancholy; scarcely had the count's gentlest horse been saddled and brought to the door.—when the father of Raoul felt his head become confused,

Digitized by Google

his legs give way, and he clearly perceived the impossibility of going one step farther. He ordered himself to be carried into the sun; they laid him upon his bed of moss, where he passed a full hour before he could recover his spirits. Nothing could be more natural than this weakness after the inert repose of the latter days. Athos took a *bouillon* to give him strength, and bathed his dried lips in a glassful of the wine he loved the best, —that old Anjou wine mentioned by Porthos in his admirable will. Then, refreshed, free in mind, he had his horse brought again; but he required the aid of his servants to mount painfully into the saddle. He did not go a hundred paces; a shivering seized him again at the turning of the road. "This is very strange!" said he to his *valet de chambre*, who accompanied him.—"Let us stop, Monsieur, I conjure you!" replied the faithful servant; "how pale you are becoming!"

"That will not prevent my pursuing my route, now I have once started," replied the count; and he gave his horse his head again. But suddenly the animal, instead of obeying the thought of his master, stopped. A movement of which Athos was unconscious had checked the bit. "Something," said Athos, "wills that I should go no farther. Support me," added he, stretching out his arms; "quick! come closer! I feel all my muscles relax, and I shall fall from my horse."

The valet had seen the movement made by his master at the moment he received the order. He went up to him quickly, and received the count in his arms; and as they were still sufficiently near the house for the servants, who had remained at the door to watch their master's departure, to perceive the disorder in the usually regular proceeding of the count, the valet called his comrades by gesture and voice, and all hastened to his assistance. Athos had gone but a few steps on his return when he felt himself better again. His strength seemed to revive, and with it the desire to go to Blois. He made his horse turn round; but at the animal's first steps, he sank again into a state of torpor and anguish. "Well, decidedly," said he, "IT IS WILLED that I should stay at home." His people flocked around him; they lifted him from his horse and carried him as quickly as possible into the house. Everything was soon prepared in his chamber, and they put him to bed.

"You will be sure to remember," said he, disposing himself to sleep, "that I expect letters from Africa this very day."—"Monsieur will no doubt hear with pleasure that Blaisois's son is gone on horseback, to gain an hour over the courier of Blois,"

replied his *valet de chambre*.—" Thank you," replied Athos, with his kindly smile.

The count fell asleep, but his disturbed slumber resembled suffering more than repose. The servant who watched him saw several times the expression of interior torture imprinted upon his features. Perhaps Athos was dreaming.

The day passed away. Blaisois's son returned; the courier had brought no news. The count reckoned the minutes with despair; he shuddered when those minutes had formed an hour. The idea that he was forgotten seized him once, and brought on a fearful pang of the heart. Everybody in the house had given up all hopes of the courier, his hour had long passed. Four times the express sent to Blois had repeated his journey, and there was nothing to the address of the count. Athos knew that the courier arrived only once a week. Here, then, was a delay of eight mortal days to be endured. He began the night in this painful persuasion. All that a sick man, irritated by suffering, can add of melancholy suppositions to probabilities always sad, Athos heaped up during the early hours of this dismal night. The fever rose; it invaded the chest, where the fire soon caught, according to the expression of the physician, who had been brought back from Blois by the son of Blaisois on his last journey. It soon reached the head. The physician made two successive bleedings, which unlodged it, but left the patient very weak, and without power of action except in his brain; and yet this redoubtable fever had ceased. It attacked with its last strokes the stiffened extremities; and as midnight struck it yielded.

The physician, seeing the incontestable improvement, returned to Blois, after having ordered some prescriptions, declaring that the count was saved. Then began for Athos a strange, indefinable state. Free to think, his mind turned towards Raoul, that beloved son. His imagination painted the fields of Africa in the environs of Djidgelli, where M. de Beaufort was to land his army. There were grey rocks, rendered green in certain parts by the waters of the sea when it lashed the shore in storms and tempests. Beyond the shore, strewed over with these rocks like tombs, ascended, in form of an amphitheatre among mastic-trees and cactus, a sort of village, full of smoke, confused noises, and terrified movements. Suddenly, from the bosom of this smoke arose a flame, which, gaining headway, presently covered the whole surface of this village, and increased by degrees, including in its red vortices tears, cries, arms extended

towards heaven. There was, for a moment, a frightful *pêle-mêle* of timbers falling, of swords broken, of stones calcined, of trees burned and disappearing. It was a strange thing that in this chaos, in which Athos distinguished raised arms, in which he heard cries, sobs, and groans, he did not see one human figure. The cannon thundered at a distance, musketry cracked, the sea moaned, flocks made their escape, bounding over the verdant slope; but not a soldier to apply the match to the batteries of cannon, not a sailor to assist in manœuvring the fleet, not a shepherd for the flocks. After the ruin of the village and the destruction of the forts which commanded it,—a ruin and a destruction operated magically without the co-operation of a single human being,—the flame was extinguished, the smoke began to descend, then diminished in intensity, paled, and disappeared entirely. Night then came over the scene,—a night dark upon the earth, brilliant in the firmament. The large, blazing stars which sparkled in the African sky shone without lighting anything even around them.

A long silence ensued, which gave, for a moment, repose to the troubled imagination of Athos; and as he felt that that which he saw was not terminated, he applied his observation more attentively to the strange spectacle which his imagination had presented. This spectacle was soon continued for him. A mild and pale moon arose behind the declivities of the coast, and streaking at first the undulating ripples of the sea, which appeared to have calmed after the roarings it had sent forth during the vision of Athos,—the moon, we say, shed its diamonds and opals upon the briers and bushes of the hill. The grey rocks, like so many silent and attentive phantoms, appeared to raise their verdant heads to examine likewise the field of battle by the light of the moon; and Athos perceived that that field, entirely empty during the combat, was now strewn with fallen bodies.

An inexpressible shudder of fear and horror seized the soul of Athos when he recognised the white and blue uniform of the soldiers of Picardy, with their long pikes and blue handles, and their muskets marked with the *fleur-de-lis* on the butts; when he saw all the gaping, cold wounds looking up to the azure heavens as if to demand back of them the souls to which they had opened a passage; when he saw the slaughtered horses, stiff, with their tongues hanging out at one side of their mouths, sleeping in the icy blood pooled around them, staining their furniture and their manes; when he saw the white horse of M. de Beaufort, with his head beaten to pieces, in the first ranks

of the dead. Athos passed a cold hand over his brow, which he was astonished not to find burning. He was convinced by this touch that he was present as a spectator, without fever, on the day after a battle fought upon the shores of Djidgelli by the army of the expedition which he had seen leave the coasts of France and disappear in the horizon, and of which he had saluted with thought and gesture the last cannon-shot fired by the duke as a signal of farewell to his country.

Who can paint the mortal agony with which his soul followed, like a vigilant eye, the trace of those dead bodies, and examined them, one after the other, to see if Raoul slept among them? Who can express the intoxication of joy with which Athos bowed before God, and gave thanks for not having seen him he sought with so much fear among the dead? In fact, fallen dead in their ranks, stiff, icy, all these dead, easy to be recognised, seemed to turn with kindness and respect towards the Comte de la Fère, to be the better seen by him during his funereal inspection. But yet he was astonished while viewing all these bodies, not to perceive the survivors. To such a point did the illusion extend, that this vision was for the father a real voyage made by him into Africa, to obtain more exact information respecting his son.

Fatigued, therefore, with having traversed seas and continents, he sought repose under one of the tents sheltered behind a rock, on the top of which floated the white *fleurdelisé* pennon. He looked for a soldier to conduct him to the tent of M. de Beaufort. Then, while his eye was wandering over the plain, turning in all directions, he saw a white form appear behind the resinous myrtles. This figure was clothed in the costume of an officer; it held in its hand a broken sword; it advanced slowly towards Athos, who, stopping short and fixing his eyes upon it, neither spoke nor moved, but wished to open his arms, because in this silent and pale officer he had just recognised Raoul. The count attempted to utter a cry; but it remained stifled in his throat. Raoul with a gesture directed him to be silent, placing his finger on his lips and drawing back by degrees, without Athos being able to see any motion of his legs. The count, more pale than Raoul, more trembling, followed his son, traversing painfully briers and bushes, stones and ditches, Raoul appearing not to touch the earth, and no obstacle impeding the lightness of his march. The count, whom the inequalities of the path fatigued, soon stopped exhausted. Raoul still continued to beckon him to follow him. The tender father,

Digitized by Google

to whom love restored strength, made a last effort and climbed the mountain after the young man, who drew him onward by his gesture and his smile.

At length Athos gained the crest of the hill, and saw, thrown out in black upon the horizon whitened by the moon, the airy, visionary form of Raoul. Athos stretched out his hand to get closer to his beloved son upon the plateau, and the latter also stretched out his; but suddenly, as if the young man had been drawn away in spite of himself, still retreating, he left the earth; and Athos saw the clear blue sky shine between the feet of his child and the ground of the hill. Raoul rose insensibly into the void, still smiling, still inviting with a gesture; he departed towards heaven. Athos uttered a cry of terrified tenderness. He looked below again. He saw a camp destroyed, and all those white bodies of the royal army, like so many motionless atoms. And then, when raising his head, he saw still, still, his son beckoning him to ascend with him.

CHAPTER CCLXIV

THE ANGEL OF DEATH

Athos was at this part of his marvellous vision when the charm was suddenly broken by a great noise rising from the outward gates of the house. A horse was heard galloping over the hard gravel of the great alley; and the sound of noisy and animated conversations ascended to the chamber in which the count was dreaming. Athos did not stir from the place he occupied; he scarcely turned his head towards the door to ascertain the sooner what these noises could be. A heavy step ascended the stairs; the horse which had recently galloped with such rapidity departed slowly towards the stables. Great hesitation appeared in the steps which by degrees approached the chamber of Athos. A door then was opened, and Athos, turning a little towards the part of the room the noise came from, cried in a weak voice, "It is a courier from Africa, is it not?"—"No, Monsieur the Count," replied a voice which made the father of Raoul start upright in his bed.

"Grimaud!" murmured he; and the sweat began to pour down his cheeks. Grimaud appeared in the doorway. It was no longer the Grimaud we have seen, still young with courage

and devotion, when he jumped the first into the boat which was to convey Raoul de Bragelonne to the vessels of the royal fleet. He was a stern and pale old man, his clothes covered with dust, his few scattered hairs whitened by old age. He trembled while leaning against the door-frame, and was near falling on seeing by the light of the lamps the countenance of his master. These two men, who had lived so long together in a community of intelligence, and whose eyes, accustomed to economise expressions, knew how to say so many things silently,—these two old friends, one as noble as the other in heart, if they were unequal in fortune and birth, remained silent while looking at each other. By the exchange of a single glance they had just read to the bottom of each other's heart. Grimaud bore upon his countenance the impression of a grief already old, of a familiarity with sorrow. He appeared now to have at his command but one interpreter of his thought. As formerly he was accustomed not to speak, he now had accustomed himself not to smile. Athos read at a glance all these shades upon the visage of his faithful servant, and in the same tone he would have employed to speak to Raoul in his dream, "Grimaud," said he, "Raoul is dead, is he not?"

Behind Grimaud the other servants listened breathlessly, with their eyes fixed upon the bed of their sick master. They heard the terrible question, and an awful silence ensued. "Yes," replied the old man, heaving up the monosyllable from his chest with a hoarse broken sigh.

Then arose voices of lamentation, which groaned without measure, and filled with regrets and prayers the chamber where the agonised father searched with his eyes the portrait of his son. This was for Athos a transition which led him to his dream. Without uttering a cry, without shedding a tear, patient, mild, resigned as a martyr, he raised his eyes towards heaven, in order to there see again, rising above the mountain of Djidgelli, the beloved shade which was leaving him at the moment of Grimaud's arrival. Without doubt, while looking towards the heavens, when resuming his marvellous dream, he returned to the same road by which the vision, at once so terrible and so sweet, had led him before; for after having gently closed his eyes, he re-opened them and began to smile,—he had just seen Raoul, who had smiled upon him. With his hands clasped upon his breast, his face turned towards the window, bathed by the fresh air of night, which brought to his pillow the aroma of the flowers and the woods, Athos entered, never again to come

Digitized by Google

out of it, into the contemplation of that paradise which the living never see. God willed, no doubt, to open to this elect the treasures of eternal beatitude at the hour when other men tremble with the idea of being severely received by the Lord, and cling to this life they know, in the dread of the other life of which they get a glimpse by the dismal murky torches of death. Athos was guided by the pure and serene soul of his son, which aspired to be like the paternal soul. Everything for this just man was melody and perfume in the rough road which souls take to return to the celestial country. After an hour of this ecstasy, Athos softly raised his hands as white as wax; the smile did not quit his lips, and he murmured low, so low as scarcely to be audible, these three words addressed to God or to Raoul, "HERE I AM!" And his hands fell down slowly, as if he himself had laid them on the bed.

Death had been kind and mild to this noble creature. It had spared him the tortures of the agony, the convulsions of the last departure; it had opened with an indulgent finger the gates of eternity to that noble soul worthy of all its respect. God had no doubt ordered it thus, that the pious remembrance of this death should remain in the hearts of those present and in the memory of other men,—a death which made the passage from this life to the other seem desirable to those whose existence upon this earth leads them not to dread the last judgment. Athos preserved, even in the eternal sleep, his placid and sincere smile,—an ornament which was to accompany him to the tomb. The quietude of his features, the peacefulness of his departure, made his servants for a long time doubt whether he had really quitted life.

The count's people wished to remove Grimaud, who from a distance devoured the face become so pale, and did not approach from the pious fear of bringing to him the breath of death. But Grimaud, fatigued as he was, refused to leave the room. He seated himself upon the threshold, watching his master with the vigilance of a sentinel, and jealous to receive either his first waking look or his last dying sigh. The noises were all hushed in the house, and every one respected the slumber of their lord. But Grimaud, anxiously listening, perceived that the count no longer breathed. He raised himself, with his hands resting on the ground, and looked to see if there did not appear some motion in the body of his master. Nothing! Fear seized him; he rose up, and at the very moment heard some one coming up the stairs. A noise of spurs knocking

Digitized by Google

against a sword—a warlike sound, familiar to his ears—stopped him as he was going towards the bed of Athos. A voice more sonorous still than brass or steel resounded within three paces of him. "Athos! Athos! my friend!" cried this voice, agitated even to tears.—"M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan!" faltered out Grimaud.

"Where is he? Where is he?" continued the musketeer. Grimaud seized his arm in his bony fingers, and pointed to the bed, upon the sheets of which the livid tints of the dead already showed. A choked breath, the opposite to a sharp cry, swelled the throat of D'Artagnan. He advanced on tiptoe, trembling, frightened at the noise his feet made upon the floor, and his heart rent by a nameless agony. He placed his ear to the breast of Athos, his face to the count's mouth. Neither noise nor breath! D'Artagnan drew back. Grimaud, who had followed him with his eyes, and for whom each of his movements had been a revelation, came timidly and seated himself at the foot of the bed and closely pressed his lips to the sheet which was raised by the stiffened feet of his master. Then large drops began to flow from his red eyes. This old man in despair, who wept, bowed down without uttering a word, presented the most moving spectacle that D'Artagnan, in a life so filled with emotion, had ever seen.

The captain remained standing in contemplation before that smiling dead man, who seemed to have kept his last thought to give to his best friend, to the man he had loved next to Raoul, —a gracious welcome even beyond life; and as if to reply to that exalted flattery of hospitality, D'Artagnan went and kissed Athos fervently on the brow, and with his trembling fingers closed his eyes. Then he seated himself by the pillow without dread of that dead man, who had been so kind and affectionate to him for thirty-five years; he fed himself greedily with the remembrances which the noble visage of the count brought to his mind in crowds, — some blooming and charming as that smile; some dark, dismal, and icy as that face with its eyes closed for eternity. All at once, the bitter flood which mounted from minute to minute invaded his heart and swelled his breast almost to bursting. Incapable of mastering his emotion, he arose; and tearing himself violently from the chamber where he had just found dead him to whom he came to report the news of the death of Porthos, he uttered sobs so heart-rending that the servants, who seemed only to wait for an explosion of grief, answered to it by their lugubrious clamours, and the dogs

Digitized by Google

of the late count by their lamentable howlings. Grimaud was the only one who did not lift up his voice. Even in the paroxysm of his grief he would not have dared to profane the dead, or for the first time disturb the slumber of his master. Besides, Athos had accustomed him never to speak.

At daybreak, D'Artagnan, who had wandered about the lower hall, biting his fingers to stifle his sighs, went up once more; and watching the moment when Grimaud turned his head towards him, he made him a sign to come to him, which the faithful servant obeyed without making more noise than a shadow. D'Artagnan went down again, followed by Grimaud; and when he had gained the vestibule, taking the old man's hands, "Grimaud," said he, "I have seen how the father died; now let me know how the son died." Grimaud drew from his breast a large letter, upon the envelope of which was traced the address of Athos. D'Artagnan recognised the writing of M. de Beaufort, broke the seal, and began to read, walking about in the first blue rays of day in the dark alley of old limes, marked by the still visible footsteps of the count who had just died.

CHAPTER CCLXV

THE BULLETIN

THE Duc de Beaufort wrote to Athos. The letter destined for the living only reached the dead. God had changed the address.

"MY DEAR COUNT [wrote the prince in his large, bad, schoolboy's hand],—a great misfortune has struck us amid a great triumph. The king loses one of the bravest of soldiers; I lose a friend; you lose M. de Bragelonne. He has died gloriously, and so gloriously that I have not the strength to weep as I could wish. Receive my sad compliments, my dear Count. Heaven distributes trials according to the greatness of our hearts. This trial is very great, but not above your courage.—Your good friend, LE DUC DE BEAUFORT."

The letter contained a relation written by one of the prince's secretaries. It was the most touching recital, and the most true, of that dismal episode which destroyed two lives. D'Artagnan, accustomed to battle emotions, and with a heart armed against tenderness, could not help starting on reading the name

of Raoul,—the name of that beloved boy who had become, as his father had, a shade.

"In the morning," said the prince's secretary, "Monseigneur commanded the attack. Normandy and Picardy had taken position in the grey rocks dominated by the heights of the mountain, upon the declivity of which were raised the bastions of Djidgelli. The cannon beginning to fire opened the action; the regiments marched full of resolution; the pikemen had their pikes elevated; the bearers of muskets had their weapons ready. The prince followed attentively the march and movements of the troops, so as to be able to sustain them with a strong reserve. With Monseigneur were the oldest captains and his aides-de-camp. M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne had received orders not to leave his highness. In the meantime the enemy's cannon, which at first had thundered with little success against the masses, had regulated its fire; and the balls, better directed, had killed several men near the prince. The regiments formed in column, and advancing against the ramparts were rather roughly handled. There was a hesitation in our troops, who found themselves ill-seconded by the artillery. In fact, the batteries which had been established the evening before had but a weak and uncertain aim, on account of their position. The direction from below to above lessened the accuracy of the shots as well as their range.

"Monseigneur, comprehending the bad effect of this position of the siege artillery, commanded the frigates moored in the little roadstead to begin a regular fire against the place. M. de Bragelonne offered himself at once to carry this order; but Monseigneur refused to acquiesce in the viscount's request. Monseigneur was right, for he loved and wished to spare the young nobleman. He was quite right, and the event justified his foresight and refusal,—for scarcely had the sergeant charged with the message solicited by M. de Bragelonne gained the seashore, when two shots from long carbines issued from the enemy's ranks and laid him low. The sergeant fell, dyeing the sand with his blood; observing which, M. de Bragelonne smiled at Monseigneur, who said to him, 'You see, Viscount, I have saved your life. Report that, some day, to M. le Comte de la Fère, in order that learning it from you he may thank me.' The young nobleman smiled sadly, and replied to the duke, 'It is true, Monseigneur, that but for your kindness I should have been killed down there where the poor sergeant has fallen, and should be at rest.' M. de Bragelonne made this reply in

such a tone that Monseigneur answered him warmly: 'Good God! young man, one would say that your mouth waters for death; but, by the soul of Henry IV., I have promised your father to bring you back alive; and, please the Lord, I will keep my word.' Monseigneur de Bragelonne coloured, and replied in a lower voice, 'Monseigneur, pardon me, I beseech you; I have always had the desire to go to meet good opportunities; and it is so delightful to distinguish ourselves before our general, particularly when that general is M. le Duc de Beaufort.'

"Monseigneur was a little softened by this; and turning to the officers who surrounded him, gave his different orders. The grenadiers of the two regiments got near enough to the ditches and the entrenchments to launch their grenades, which had but little effect. In the meanwhile, M. d'Estrées, who commanded the fleet, having seen the attempt of the sergeant to approach the vessels, understood that he must act without orders, and opened his fire. Then the Arabs, finding themselves seriously injured by the balls from the fleet, and beholding the destruction and the ruins of their bad walls, uttered the most fearful cries. Their horsemen descended the mountain at the gallop, bent over their saddles and rushed full tilt upon the columns of infantry, which crossing their pikes stopped this mad assault. Repulsed by the firm attitude of the battalion, the Arabs threw themselves with great fury upon the commander's position, which at that moment was not protected.

"The danger was great; Monseigneur drew his sword; his secretaries and people imitated him; the officers of the suite engaged in combat with the furious Arabs. It was then that M. de Bragelonne was able to gratify the inclination he had manifested from the beginning of the action. He fought near the prince with the valour of a Roman, and killed three Arabs with his small sword. But it was evident that his bravery did not arise from the sentiment of pride natural to all who fight. It was impetuous, affected, forced even; he sought to intoxicate himself with noise and carnage. He excited himself to such a degree that Monseigneur called out to him to stop. He must have heard the voice of Monseigneur, because we who were close to him heard it. He did not, however, stop, but continued his course towards the entrenchments. As M. de Bragelonne was a well-disciplined officer, this disobedience to the orders of Monseigneur very much surprised everybody, and M. de Beaufort redoubled his earnestness, crying, 'Stop, Bragelonne!

Where are you going? Stop,' repeated Monseigneur, 'I command you!' We all, imitating the gesture of Monsieur the Duke—we all raised our hands. We expected that the cavalier would turn bridle; but M. de Bragelonne continued to ride towards the palisades. 'Stop, Bragelonne!' repeated the prince, in a very loud voice; 'stop! in the name of your father!'

"At these words M. de Bragelonne turned round, his countenance expressed a lively grief; but he did not stop. We then concluded that his horse must have run away with him. When Monsieur the Duke had imagined that the viscount was not master of his horse, and had seen him precede the first grenadiers, his highness cried, 'Musketeers, kill his horse! A hundred pistoles for him who shall kill his horse!' But who could expect to hit the beast without at least wounding his rider? No one durst venture. At length one presented himself; he was a sharpshooter of the regiment of Picardy, named Luzerne, who took aim at the animal, fired, and hit him in the quarters, for we saw the blood redden the hair of the horse. Instead of falling, the cursed *genet* carried him on more furiously than ever. Every Picard who saw this unfortunate young man rushing on to meet death, shouted in the loudest manner, 'Throw yourself off, Monsieur the Viscount! off! off! throw yourself off!' M. de Bragelonne was an officer much beloved in the army! Already had the viscount arrived within pistol-shot of the ramparts; a discharge was poured upon him and enveloped him in its fire and smoke. We lost sight of him; the smoke dispersed; he was on foot, standing; his horse was killed.

"The viscount was summoned to surrender by the Arabs, but he made them a negative sign with his head, and continued to march towards the palisades. This was a mortal imprudence. Nevertheless, the whole army was pleased that he would not retreat, since ill chance had led him so near. He marched a few paces farther, and the two regiments clapped their hands. It was at this moment the second discharge shook the walls, and the Vicomte de Bragelonne again disappeared in the smoke; but this time the smoke was dispersed in vain,—we no longer saw him standing. He was down, with his head lower than his legs, among the bushes; and the Arabs began to think of leaving their entrenchments to come and cut off his head or take his body, as is their custom with the infidels. But Monseigneur le Duc de Beaufort had followed all this with his eyes, and the

sad spectacle drew from him many and painful sighs. He then cried aloud, seeing the Arabs running like white phantoms among the mastic-trees, 'Grenadiers! pikemen! will you let them take that noble body?' Saying these words and waving his sword, he himself rode towards the enemy. The regiments, rushing in his steps, ran in their turn, uttering cries as terrible as those of the Arabs were wild.

"The combat began over the body of M. de Bragelonne; and with such inveteracy was it fought that a hundred and sixty Arabs were left upon the field by the side of at least fifty of our troops. It was a lieutenant from Normandy who took the body of the viscount on his shoulders and carried it back to the lines. The advantage was, however, pursued; the regiments took the reserve with them; and the enemy's palisades were destroyed. At three o'clock the fire of the Arabs ceased. The hand-to-hand fight lasted two hours; that was a massacre. At five o'clock we were victorious on all the points; the enemy had abandoned his positions, and Monsieur the Duke had ordered the white flag to be planted upon the culminating point of the little mountain. It was then we had time to think of M. de Bragelonne, who had eight large wounds through his body, by which almost all his blood had escaped. Still, however, he breathed, which afforded inexpressible joy to Monseigneur, who insisted upon being present at the first dressing of the wounds and at the consultation of the surgeons. There were two among them who declared M. de Bragelonne would live. Monseigneur threw his arms round their necks, and promised them a thousand louis each if they could save him.

"The viscount heard these transports of joy, and whether he was in despair, or whether he suffered much from his wounds, he expressed by his countenance a contradiction which gave rise to reflection, particularly in one of the secretaries when he had heard what follows. The third surgeon was Frère Sylvain de Saint-Cosme, the most learned of ours. He probed the wounds in his turn, and said nothing. M. de Bragelonne fixed his eyes steadily upon the skilful surgeon, and seemed to interrogate his every movement. The latter, upon being questioned by Monseigneur, replied that he saw plainly three mortal wounds out of eight, but so strong was the constitution of the wounded, so rich was he in youth, and so merciful was the goodness of God that perhaps M. de Bragelonne might recover, particularly if he did not move in the slightest manner. Frère Sylvain added, turning towards his assistants, 'Above every-

thing, do not allow him to move even a finger, or you will kill him;' and we all left the tent in very low spirits. That secretary I have mentioned, on leaving the tent thought he perceived a faint and sad smile glide over the lips of M. de Bragelonne when the duke said to him in a cheerful, kind voice, 'We shall save you, Viscount, we shall save you!'

"In the evening, when it was believed the wounded young man had taken some repose, one of the assistants entered his tent, but rushed immediately out again, uttering loud cries. We all ran up in disorder, Monsieur the Duke with us; and the assistant pointed to the body of M. de Bragelonne upon the ground at the foot of his bed, bathed in the remainder of his blood. It appeared that he had had some convulsion, some febrile movement, and that he had fallen; that the fall had accelerated his end, according to the prediction of Frère Sylvain. We raised the viscount; he was cold and dead. He held a lock of fair hair in his right hand, and that hand was pressed tightly upon his heart."

Then followed the details of the expedition, and of the victory obtained over the Arabs. D'Artagnan stopped at the account of the death of poor Raoul. "Oh," murmured he, "unhappy boy! a suicide!" And turning his eyes towards the chamber of the château in which Athos slept in eternal sleep, "They kept their promise to each other," said he, in a low voice. "Now I believe them to be happy; they must be reunited;" and he returned through the parterre with slow and melancholy steps. All the village, all the neighbourhood, was filled with grieving neighbours relating to one another the double catastrophe, and making preparations for the funeral.

CHAPTER CCLXVI

THE LAST CANTO OF THE POEM

On the morrow all the nobility of the provinces, of the environs, and from wherever messengers had carried the news, were seen to arrive. D'Artagnan had shut himself up, unwilling to speak to anybody. Two such heavy deaths falling upon the captain so closely after the death of Porthos, for a long time oppressed that spirit which had hitherto been so indefatigable and invulnerable. Except Grimaud, who entered his chamber once, the

Digitized by Google

musketeer saw neither servants nor guests. He supposed, from the noises in the house and the continual coming and going, that preparations were making for the funeral of the count. He wrote to the king to ask for an extension of his leave of absence. Grimaud, as we have said, had entered D'Artagnan's apartment, had seated himself upon a joint-stool near the door, like a man who meditates profoundly; then, rising, he made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow him. The latter obeyed in silence. Grimaud descended to the count's bedchamber, showed the captain with his finger the place of the empty bed, and raised his eyes eloquently towards heaven. "Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "yes, good Grimaud,—now with the son he loved so much!"

Grimaud left the chamber and led the way to the hall where, according to the custom of the province, the body was laid out previously to its being buried for ever. D'Artagnan was struck at seeing two open coffins in the hall. In reply to the mute invitation of Grimaud, he approached and saw in one of them Athos, still handsome in death, and in the other Raoul, with his eyes closed, his cheeks pearly as those of the Pallas of Virgil, with a smile on his violet lips. He shuddered at seeing the father and son, those two departed souls, represented on earth by two silent, melancholy bodies, incapable of touching each other, however close they might be. "Raoul here?" murmured he; "oh, Grimaud, why did you not tell me this?"

Grimaud shook his head and made no reply; but taking D'Artagnan by the hand, he led him to the coffin and showed him under the thin winding-sheet the black wounds by which life had escaped. The captain turned away his eyes, and judging it useless to question Grimaud, who would not answer, he recollected that M. de Beaufort's secretary had written more than he, D'Artagnan, had had the courage to read. Taking up the recital of the affair which had cost Raoul his life, he found these words, which terminated the last paragraph of the letter:—"Monsieur the Duke has ordered that the body of Monsieur the Viscount should be embalmed, after the manner practised by the Arabs when they wish their bodies to be carried to their native land; and Monsieur the Duke has appointed relays, so that a confidential servant who had brought up the young man might take back his remains to M. le Comte de la Fère."

"And so," thought D'Artagnan, "I shall follow thy funeral, my dear boy,—I, already old; I, who am of no value on earth,

—and I shall scatter the dust upon that brow which I kissed but two months since. God has willed it to be so,—thou hast willed it to be so thyself; I have no longer the right even to weep. Thou hast chosen death; it hath seemed to thee preferable to life."

At length arrived the moment when the cold remains of these two gentlemen were to be returned to the earth. There was such an affluence of military and other people that up to the place of sepulture, which was a chapel in the plain, the road from the city was filled with horsemen and pedestrians in mourning habits. Athos had chosen for his resting-place the little enclosure of a chapel erected by himself near the boundary of his estates. He had had the stones, cut in 1550, brought from an old Gothic manor-house in Berry, which had sheltered his early youth. The chapel, thus rebuilt, thus transported, was pleasantly placed under the foliage of poplars and sycamores. Services were held in it every Sunday by the curé of the neighbouring village, to whom Athos paid an allowance of two hundred livres for this purpose; and all the vassals of his domain, to the number of about forty,—the labourers and the farmers, with their families,—came hither to hear Mass, without need of going to the city. Behind the chapel extended, surrounded by two high hedges of nut-trees, elders, whitethorns, and a deep ditch, the little enclosure,—uncultivated, it is true, but gay in its wildness; because the mosses there were high; because the wild heliotropes and wallflowers there mixed their perfumes; because beneath the tall chestnuts issued a large spring, a prisoner in a cistern of marble; and upon the thyme all around alighted thousands of bees from the neighbouring plains, while chaffinches and redthroats sang cheerfully among the flowers of the hedge. It was to this place the two coffins were brought, attended by a silent and respectful crowd. The office of the dead being celebrated, the last adieux paid to the noble departed, the assembly dispersed, talking, along the roads, of the virtues and mild death of the father, of the hopes the son had given, and of his melancholy end upon the coast of Africa.

Gradually all noises were extinguished, as were the lamps illumining the humble nave. The minister bowed for a last time to the altar and the still fresh graves; then, followed by his assistant, who rang a hoarse bell, he slowly took the road back to the presbytery. D'Artagnan, left alone, perceived that night was coming on. He had forgotten the hour while thinking of the dead. He arose from the oaken bench on which he was

seated in the chapel, and wished, as the priest had done, to go and bid a last adieu to the double grave which contained his two lost friends.

A woman was praying, kneeling on the moist earth. D'Artagnan stopped at the door of the chapel to avoid disturbing this woman, and also to endeavour to see who was the pious friend who performed this sacred duty with so much zeal and perseverance. The unknown concealed her face in her hands, which were white as alabaster. From the noble simplicity of her costume, she seemed to be a woman of distinction. Outside the enclosure were several horses mounted by servants, and a travelling-carriage waiting for this lady. D'Artagnan in vain sought to make out what caused her delay. She continued praying; she frequently passed her handkerchief over her face,—by which D'Artagnan perceived that she was weeping. He saw her strike her breast with the pitiless compunction of a Christian woman. He heard her several times cry, as if from a wounded heart, "Pardon! pardon!" and as she appeared to abandon herself entirely to her grief, as she threw herself down, almost fainting, amid complaints and prayers, D'Artagnan, touched by this love for his so much regretted friends, made a few steps towards the grave, in order to interrupt the melancholy colloquy of the penitent with the dead. But as soon as his step sounded on the gravel, the unknown raised her head, revealing to D'Artagnan a face bathed with tears, but a well-known face; it was Mademoiselle de la Vallière. "M. d'Artagnan!" murmured she.

"You!" replied the captain in a stern voice, "you here! Oh, Madame, I should better have liked to see you decked with flowers in the mansion of the Comte de la Fère. You would have wept less—they too—I too!"—"Monsieur!" she said, sobbing.—"For it is you," added this pitiless friend of the dead, —"it is you who have laid these two men in the grave."—"Oh, spare me!"—"God forbid, Madame, that I should offend a woman, or that I should make her weep in vain! but I must say that the place of the murderer is not upon the grave of her victims." She wished to reply. "What I now tell you," added he, coldly, "I told the king."

She clasped her hands. "I know," said she, "I have caused the death of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."—"Ah! you know it?"—"The news arrived at court yesterday. I have travelled during the night forty leagues to come and ask pardon of the

Digitized by Google

count, whom I supposed to be still living, and to supplicate God upon the tomb of Raoul that he would send me all the misfortunes I have merited, except a single one. Now, Monsieur, I know that the death of the son has killed the father. I have two crimes to reproach myself with; I have two punishments to look for from God."

"I will repeat to you, Mademoiselle," said D'Artagnan, "what M. de Bragelonne said of you at Antibes, when he already meditated death: 'If pride and coquetry have misled her, I pardon her while despising her. If love has produced her error, I pardon her, swearing that no one could have loved her as I have done.'"—"You know," interrupted Louise, "that for my love I was about to sacrifice myself; you know whether I suffered when you met me, lost, dying, abandoned. Well! never have I suffered so much as now; because then I hoped, I desired,—now I have nothing to wish for; because this death drags away all my joy into the tomb; because I can no longer dare to love without remorse, and I feel that he whom I love—oh! that is the law—will repay me with the tortures I have made others undergo."

D'Artagnan made no reply; he was too well convinced that she was not mistaken. "Well, then," added she, "dear M. d'Artagnan, do not overwhelm me to-day, I again implore you. I am like the branch torn from the trunk, I no longer hold to anything in this world, and a current drags me on, I know not whither. I love madly, I love to the point of coming to tell it, impious as I am, over the ashes of the dead; and I do not blush for it,—I have no remorse on account of it. This love is a religion. Only, as hereafter you will see me alone, forgotten, disdained; as you will see me punished with that with which I am destined to be punished, spare me in my ephemeral happiness, leave it to me for a few days, for a few minutes. Now, even at the moment I am speaking to you perhaps it no longer exists. My God! This double murder is perhaps already expiated!"

While she was speaking thus, the sound of voices and the tread of horses drew the attention of the captain. M. de Saint-Aignan came to seek La Vallière. The king, he said, was a prey to jealousy and uneasiness. De Saint-Aignan did not see D'Artagnan, half-concealed by the trunk of a chestnut-tree which shaded the two graves. Louise thanked De Saint-Aignan, and dismissed him with a gesture. He rejoined the party outside the enclosure. "You see, Madame," said the captain,

bitterly, to the young woman,—" you see that your happiness still lasts."

The young woman raised her head with a solemn air. " A day will come," said she, " when you will repent of having judged me so harshly. On that day, it will be I who will pray God to forgive you for having been unjust towards me. Besides, I shall suffer so much that you will be the first to pity my sufferings. Do not reproach me with that happiness, M. d'Artagnan; it costs me dear, and I have not paid all my debt." Saying these words, she again knelt down, softly and affectionately. " Pardon me, the last time, my affianced Raoul! " said she. " I have broken our chain; we are both destined to die of grief. It is thou who departest the first; fear nothing, I shall follow thee. See, only, that I have not been base, and that I have come to bid thee this last adieu. The Lord is my witness, Raoul, that if with my life I could have redeemed thine, I would have given that life without hesitation: I could not give my love. Once more, pardon! " She gathered a branch and stuck it into the ground; then, wiping the tears from her eyes, she bowed to D'Artagnan and disappeared.

The captain watched the departure of the horses, horsemen, and carriage; then crossing his arms upon his swelling chest, " When will it be my turn to depart? " said he, in an agitated voice. " What is there left for man after youth, after love, after glory, after friendship, after strength, after riches? That rock, under which sleeps Porthos, who possessed all I have named; this moss, under which repose Athos and Raoul, who possessed still much more! " He hesitated a moment with a dull eye; then, drawing himself up, " Forward! still forward! " said he. " When it shall be time, God will tell me, as he has told others." He touched the earth, moistened with the evening dew, with the tips of his fingers, made a sign as if he had been at the *bénitier* of a church, and retook alone—ever alone—the road to Paris.

Digitized by Google

EPILOGUE

Four years after the scene we have just described, two horsemen, well mounted, traversed Blois early in the morning, for the purpose of arranging a birding-party which the king intended to make in that uneven plain which the Loire divides in two, and which borders on the one side on Meung, on the other on Amboise. These were the captain of the king's harriers and the governor of the falcons,—personages greatly respected in the time of Louis XIII., but rather neglected by his successor. These two horsemen, having reconnoitred the ground, were returning, their observations made, when they perceived some little groups of soldiers here and there whom the sergeants were placing at distances at the openings of the enclosures. These were the king's musketeers. Behind them came, upon a good horse, the captain, known by his richly embroidered uniform. His hair was grey, his beard was becoming so. He appeared a little bent, although sitting and handling his horse gracefully. He was looking about him watchfully.

"M. d'Artagnan does not get any older," said the captain of the harriers to his colleague the falconer; "with ten years more than either of us, he has the seat of a young man on horseback."—"That is true," replied the falconer. "I haven't seen any change in him for the last twenty years." But this officer was mistaken; D'Artagnan in the last four years had lived twelve years. Age imprinted its pitiless claws at each corner of his eyes; his brow was bald; his hands, formerly brown and nervous, were getting white, as if the blood began to chill there.

D'Artagnan accosted the officers with the shade of affability which distinguishes superior men, and received in return for his courtesy two most respectful bows. "Ah! what a lucky chance to see you here, M. d'Artagnan!" cried the falconer.

"It is rather I who should say that, Messieurs," replied the captain, "for nowadays the king makes more frequent use of his musketeers than of his falcons."—"Ah! it is not as it was in the good old times," sighed the falconer. "Do you remember, M. d'Artagnan, when the late king flew the pie in the vineyards beyond Beaugency? Ah, *dame!* you were not captain of the musketeers at that time, M. d'Artagnan."

Digitized by Google

"And you were nothing but under-corporal of the tiercels," replied D'Artagnan, laughing. "Never mind that; it was a good time, seeing that it is always a good time when we are young. Good-day, Monsieur the Captain of the harriers."—"You do me honour, Monsieur the Count," said the latter. D'Artagnan made no reply. The title of count had not struck him; D'Artagnan had been a count four years.

"Are you not very much fatigued with the long journey you have had, Monsieur the Captain?" continued the falconer. "It must be full two hundred leagues from hence to Pignerol."—"Two hundred and sixty to go, and as many to come back," said D'Artagnan, quietly.—"And," said the falconer, "is *he* well?"—"Who?" asked D'Artagnan.—"Why, poor M. Fouquet," continued the falconer, still in a low voice. The captain of the harriers had prudently withdrawn.

"No," replied D'Artagnan, "the poor man frets terribly; he cannot comprehend how imprisonment can be a favour. He says that the parliament had absolved him by banishing him, and that banishment is liberty. He does not imagine that they have sworn his death, and that to save his life from the claws of the parliament would be to incur too much obligation to God."—"Ah, yes; the poor man had a near chance of the scaffold," replied the falconer; "it is said that M. Colbert had given orders to the governor of the Bastille, and that the execution was ordered."

"Enough!" said D'Artagnan, pensively, and with a view to cutting short the conversation.—"Yes," said the captain of the harriers, approaching, "M. Fouquet is now at Pignerol; he has richly deserved it. He has had the good fortune to be conducted there by you; he had robbed the king enough." D'Artagnan cast at the master of the dogs one of his evil looks, and said to him, "Monsieur, if any one told me that you had eaten your dogs' meat, not only would I refuse to believe it, but, still more, if you were condemned to the whip or the jail for it, I should pity you, and would not allow people to speak ill of you. And yet, Monsieur, honest man as you may be, I assure you that you are not more so than poor M. Fouquet was."

After having undergone this sharp rebuke, the captain of the harriers hung his head, and allowed the falconer to get two steps in advance of him nearer to D'Artagnan. "He is content," said the falconer, in a low voice, to the musketeer; "we all know that harriers are in fashion nowadays. If he were a falconer he would not talk in that way."

Digitized by Google

D'Artagnan smiled in a melancholy manner at seeing this great political question resolved by the discontent of such humble interests. He for a moment ran over in his mind the glorious existence of the superintendent, the crumbling away of his fortunes, and the melancholy death that awaited him; and, to conclude, "Did M. Fouquet love falconry?" said he.—"Oh, passionately, Monsieur!" replied the falconer, with an accent of bitter regret and a sigh that was the funeral oration of Fouquet.

D'Artagnan allowed the ill-humour of the one and the regrets of the other to pass, and continued to advance into the plain. They could already catch glimpses of the huntsmen at the issues of the wood, the feathers of the outriders passing like shooting stars across the clearings, and the white horses cutting with their luminous apparitions the dark thickets of the copses.

"But," resumed D'Artagnan, "will the sport be long? Pray, give us a good swift bird, for I am very tired. Is it a heron or a swan?"—"Both, M. d'Artagnan," said the falconer; "but you need not be alarmed, the king is not much of a sportsman. He does not sport on his own account; he only wishes to give amusement to the ladies."

The words "to the ladies" were so strongly accented that it set D'Artagnan listening. "Ah!" said he, looking at the falconer with surprise. The captain of the harriers smiled, no doubt with a view of making it up with the musketeer. "Oh, you may safely laugh," said D'Artagnan; "I know nothing of current news. I arrived only yesterday, after a month's absence. I left the court mourning the death of the queen-mother. The king was not willing to take any amusement after receiving the last sigh of Anne of Austria; but everything has an end in this world. Well! then he is no longer sad? So much the better."

"And everything begins as well as ends," said the captain of the dogs, with a coarse laugh.—"Ah!" said D'Artagnan a second time,—he burned to know; but dignity would not allow him to interrogate persons below him,—"there is something new, then, it appears?"

The captain gave him a significant wink; but D'Artagnan was unwilling to learn anything from this man. "Shall we see the king early?" asked he of the falconer.—"At seven o'clock, Monsieur, I shall fly the birds."—"Who comes with the king? How is Madame? How is the queen?"—"Better, Monsieur."

—"Has she been ill, then?"—"Monsieur, since the last chagrin she had, her Majesty has been unwell."

"What chagrin? You need not fancy your news is old. I am but just returned."—"It appears that the queen, a little neglected since the death of her mother-in-law, complained to the king, who replied to her, 'Do I not sleep with you every night, Madame? What more do you want?'"—"Ah!" said D'Artagnan,—"poor woman! She must heartily hate Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Oh, no! not Mademoiselle de la Vallière," replied the falconer.—"Who, then—" The horn interrupted this conversation. It summoned the dogs and the hawks. The falconer and his companion set off immediately, leaving D'Artagnan alone in the midst of the suspended sentence. The king appeared at a distance, surrounded by ladies and horsemen. All the troop advanced in beautiful order, at a foot's pace, the horns of various sorts animating the dogs and the horses. It was a movement, a noise, a mirage of light, of which nothing now can give an idea, unless it be the fictitious splendour or false majesty of a theatrical spectacle. D'Artagnan, with an eye little weakened, distinguished behind the group three carriages. The first was intended for the queen: it was empty. D'Artagnan, who did not see Mademoiselle de la Vallière by the king's side, on looking about for her, saw her in the second carriage. She was alone with two of her women, who seemed as dull as their mistress. On the left hand of the king, upon a high-spirited horse, restrained by a bold and skilful hand, shone a lady of the most dazzling beauty. The king smiled upon her, and she smiled upon the king. Loud laughter followed every word she spoke.

"I must know that woman," thought the musketeer; "who can she be?" And he stooped towards his friend the falconer, to whom he addressed the question he had put to himself. The falconer was about to reply, when the king, perceiving D'Artagnan, said, "Ah, Count! you are returned then! Why have I not seen you?"—"Sire," replied the captain, "because your Majesty was asleep when I arrived, and not awake when I resumed my duties this morning."—"Still the same!" said Louis, in a loud voice, denoting satisfaction. "Take some rest, Count; I command you to do so. You will dine with me to-day."

A murmur of admiration surrounded D'Artagnan like an immense caress. Every one was eager to salute him. Dining

with the king was an honour his Majesty was not so prodigal of as Henry IV. had been. The king passed a few steps in advance, and D'Artagnan found himself in the midst of a fresh group, among whom shone M. Colbert. "Good-day, M. d'Artagnan," said the minister, with affable politeness; "have you had a pleasant journey?"—"Yes, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing to the neck of his horse.—"I heard the king invite you to his table for this evening," continued the minister; "you will meet an old friend there."

"An old friend of mine?" asked D'Artagnan, plunging painfully into the dark waves of the past which had swallowed up for him so many friendships and so many hatreds.—"M. le Duc d'Alaméda, who is arrived this morning from Spain."

"The Duc d'Alaméda?" said D'Artagnan, reflecting in vain.—"I!" said an old man, white as snow, sitting bent in his carriage, which he caused to be thrown open to make room for the musketeer.—"Aramis!" cried D'Artagnan, struck with stupor. And, inert as he was, he suffered the thin arm of the old nobleman to rest trembling on his neck.

Colbert, after having observed them in silence for a minute, put his horse forward, and left the two old friends together. "And so," said the musketeer, taking the arm of Aramis, "you, the exile, the rebel, are again in France?"—"And I shall dine with you at the king's table," said Aramis, smiling. "Yes; will you not ask yourself what is the use of fidelity in this world? Stop! let us allow poor La Vallière's carriage to pass. See how uneasy she is! How her eye, dimmed with tears, follows the king, who is riding on horseback yonder!"—"With whom?"—"With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, now become Madame de Montespan," replied Aramis.

"She is jealous; is she then deserted?"—"Not quite yet, but soon will be." They chatted together while following the sport, and Aramis's coachman drove them so cleverly that they got up at the moment when the falcon, attacking the bird, beat him down and fell upon him. The king alighted; Madame de Montespan followed his example. They were in front of an isolated chapel, concealed by large trees, already despoiled of their leaves by the first winds of autumn. Behind this chapel was an enclosure entered only by a latticed gate. The falcon had beat down his prey in the enclosure belonging to this little chapel, and the king was desirous of going in to take the first feather, according to custom. The *cortége* formed a circle round the building and the hedges, too small to receive so many.

Digitized by Google

D'Artagnan held back Aramis by the arm as he was about, like the rest, to alight from his carriage, and in a broken voice, "Do you know, Aramis," said he, "whither chance has conducted us?"—"No," replied the duke.—"Here repose people I have known," said D'Artagnan, much agitated.

Aramis, without divining anything, and with a trembling step, penetrated into the chapel by a little door which D'Artagnan opened for him. "Where are they buried?" said he.—"There, in the enclosure. There is a cross, you see, under that little cypress. The little cypress is planted over their tomb. Don't go to it; the king is going that way,—the heron has fallen just there."

Aramis stopped, and concealed himself in the shade. They then saw, without being seen, the pale face of La Vallière, who, neglected in her carriage, had at first looked on with a melancholy heart from the door, and then, carried away by jealousy, had advanced into the chapel, whence, leaning against a pillar, she contemplated in the enclosure the king smiling and making signs to Madame de Montespan to approach, as there was nothing to be afraid of. Madame de Montespan complied; she took the hand the king held out to her, and he, plucking out the first feather from the heron, which the falconer had strangled, placed it in the hat of his beautiful companion. She, smiling in her turn, kissed the hand tenderly which made her this present. The king blushed with pleasure; he looked at Madame de Montespan with all the fire of love. "What will you give me in exchange?" said he.

She broke off a little branch of cypress and offered it to the king, intoxicated with hope. "Humph!" said Aramis to D'Artagnan; "the present is but a sad one, for that cypress shades a tomb."—"Yes, and the tomb is that of Raoul de Bragelonne," said D'Artagnan, aloud; "of Raoul, who sleeps under that cross with Athos his father."

A groan was heard behind them. They saw a woman fall fainting to the ground. Mademoiselle de la Vallière had seen and heard all. "Poor woman!" muttered D'Artagnan, as he helped the attendants to carry back to her carriage her who from that time was to suffer.

That evening D'Artagnan was seated at the king's table, near M. Colbert and M. le Duc d'Alaméda. The king was very gay. He paid a thousand little attentions to the queen, a thousand kindnesses to Madame, seated at his left hand, and very sad. It might have been supposed to be that calm time

when the king used to watch the eyes of his mother for assent or dissent to what he had just spoken. Of mistresses there was no question at this dinner. The king addressed Aramis two or three times, calling him Monsieur the Ambassador, which increased the surprise already felt by D'Artagnan at seeing his friend the rebel so marvellously well received at court.

The king, on rising from table, gave his hand to the queen and made a sign to Colbert, whose eye watched that of his master. Colbert took D'Artagnan and Aramis on one side. The king began to chat with his sister, while Monsieur, very uneasy, entertained the queen with a preoccupied air, without ceasing to watch his wife and brother from the corner of his eye. The conversation between Aramis, D'Artagnan, and Colbert turned upon indifferent subjects. They spoke of preceding ministers; Colbert related the feats of Mazarin, and had those of Richelieu related to him. D'Artagnan could not overcome his surprise at finding this man, with heavy eyebrows and a low forehead, contain so much sound knowledge and cheerful humour. Aramis was astonished at that lightness of character which permitted a serious man to retard with advantage the moment for a more important conversation, to which nobody made any allusion, although all three interlocutors felt the imminence of it.

It was very plain from the embarrassed appearance of Monsieur how much the conversation of the king and Madame annoyed him. The eyes of Madame were almost red; was she going to complain? Was she going to commit a little scandal in open court? The king took her on one side, and in a tone so tender that it must have reminded the princess of the time when she was loved for herself, "Sister," said he, "why do I see tears in those beautiful eyes?"—"Why—Sire—" said she. —"Monsieur is jealous, is he not, sister?" She looked towards Monsieur,—an infallible sign that they were talking about him. "Yes," said she.

"Listen to me," said the king; "if your friends compromise you, it is not Monsieur's fault." He spoke these words with so much kindness that Madame, encouraged,—she who had had so many griefs for so long a time,—was near bursting into tears, so full was her heart. "Come, come, dear sister," said the king, "tell me your griefs. By the word of a brother, I pity them; by the word of a king, I will end them."

She raised her fine eyes, and in a melancholy tone, "It is not my friends who compromise me," said she. "They are either

absent or concealed; they have been brought into disgrace with your Majesty,—they, so devoted, so good, so loyal!"—"You say this on account of De Guiche, whom I have exiled at the desire of Monsieur?"—"And who, since that unjust exile, has endeavoured once every day to get himself killed!"

"Unjust, do you say, sister?"—"So unjust, that if I had not had the respect mingled with friendship that I have always entertained for your Majesty—"—"Well?"—"Well! I would have asked my brother Charles, upon whom I can always—" The king started. "What then?"—"I would have asked him to have it represented to you that Monsieur and his favourite, M. le Chevalier de Lorraine, ought not with impunity to constitute themselves the executioners of my honour and my happiness."

"The Chevalier de Lorraine," said the king,—"that dismal fellow?"—"He is my mortal enemy. While that man lives in my household, where Monsieur retains him and delegates his powers to him, I shall be the most miserable woman in this kingdom."

"So," said the king, slowly, "you call your brother of England a better friend than I am?"—"Actions speak for themselves, Sire."—"And you would prefer going to ask assistance there—"—"To my own country!" said she, with pride; "yes, Sire."—"You are the grandchild of Henry IV. as well as myself, my friend. Cousin and brother-in-law, does not that amount pretty nearly to the title of brother-german?"—"Then," said Henrietta, "act!"

"Let us form an alliance."—"Begin."—"I have, you say, unjustly exiled De Guiche."—"Oh, yes," said she, blushing.—"De Guiche shall return."—"So far, well."—"And now you say that I am wrong in having in your household the Chevalier de Lorraine, who gives Monsieur ill advice respecting you?"—"Remember well what I tell you, Sire: the Chevalier de Lorraine some day— Observe, if ever I come to an ill end, I accuse beforehand the Chevalier de Lorraine; he has a soul capable of any crime!"—"The Chevalier de Lorraine shall no longer annoy you; I promise you that."

"Then that will be a true preliminary of alliance, Sire,—I sign; but since you have done your part, tell me what shall be mine."—"Instead of embroiling me with your brother Charles, you must make him my more intimate friend than ever."—"That is very easy."—"Oh! not quite so much so as you may think, for in ordinary friendship persons embrace or exercise

Digitized by Google

hospitality, and that only costs a kiss or a return,—easy expenses; but in political friendship—"

"Ah! it's a political friendship, is it?"—"Yes, my sister; and then, instead of embraces and feasts, it is soldiers—it is soldiers all living and well equipped—that we must serve up to our friend; vessels we must offer, all armed with cannons and stored with provisions. It hence results that we have not always our coffers in a fit state to form such friendships."—"Ah! you are quite right," said Madame; "the coffers of the king of England have been very sonorous for some time."—"But you, my sister, who have so much influence over your brother,—you can obtain more than an ambassador ever could obtain."

"To effect that I must go to London, my dear brother."—"I have thought so," replied the king, eagerly; "and I have said to myself that such a voyage would do your spirits good."—"Only," interrupted Madame, "it is possible I should fail. The king of England has dangerous counsellors."

"Counsellors, do you say?"—"Precisely. If, by chance, your Majesty had any intention—I am only supposing so—of asking Charles II. his alliance for a war—"—"For a war?"—"Yes; well, then the counsellors of the king, who are to the number of seven,—Mademoiselle Stewart, Mademoiselle Wells, Mademoiselle Gwyn, Miss Orchay, Mademoiselle Zunga, Miss Daws, and the Countess of Castlemaine,—will represent to the king that war costs a great deal of money; that it is far better to give balls and suppers at Hampton Court than to equip vessels of the line at Portsmouth and Greenwich."—"And then your negotiations will fail?"—"Oh! those ladies cause all negotiations to fail that they don't make themselves."

"Do you know the idea that has struck me, sister?"—"No; tell me what it is."—"It is that by searching well around you, you might perhaps find a female counsellor to take with you to your brother whose eloquence might paralyse the ill-will of the seven others."—"That is really an idea, Sire; and I will search."—"You will find what you want."—"I hope so."

"A pretty person is necessary; an agreeable face is better than an ugly one, is it not?"—"Most assuredly."—"An animated, lively, audacious character?"—"Certainly."—"Nobility,—that is, enough to enable her to approach the king without awkwardness; little enough, so that she may not trouble herself about the dignity of her race."—"Quite just."—"And who knows a little English."—"*Mon Dieu!* why,

some one," cried Madame, "like Mademoiselle de Kéroualle, for instance!"

"Oh! why, yes!" said Louis XIV.; "you have found—it is you who have found, my sister."—"I will take her; she will have no cause to complain, I suppose."—"Oh, no; I will name her *séductrice plénipotentiaire* at once, and will add the dowry to the title."—"That is well."—"I fancy you already on your road, my dear little sister, and consoled for all your griefs."

"I will go on two conditions. The first is, that I shall know what I am negotiating about."—"This is it. The Dutch, you know, insult me daily in their gazettes, and by their republican attitude. I don't like republics."—"That may easily be conceived, Sire."—"I see with pain that these kings of the sea—they call themselves so—keep trade from France in the Indies, and that their vessels will soon occupy all the ports of Europe. Such a power is too near me, sister."

"They are your allies, nevertheless."—"That is why they were wrong in having the medal you have heard of struck,—a medal which represents Holland stopping the sun, as Joshua did, with this legend: *The sun has stopped before me.* There is not much fraternity in that, is there?"—"I thought you had forgotten that miserable affair."—"I forget nothing, my sister. And if my true friends, such as your brother Charles, are willing to second me—" The princess remained pensively silent. "Listen to me; there is the empire of the seas to be shared. In this partition, which England submits to, could I not represent the second party as well as the Dutch?"—"We have Mademoiselle de Kéroualle to treat that question," replied Madame.

"Your second condition for going, if you please, sister?"—"The consent of Monsieur, my husband."—"You shall have it."—"Then consider me gone, my brother."

On hearing these words, Louis XIV. turned round towards the corner of the room in which D'Artagnan, Colbert, and Aramis stood, and made an affirmative sign to his minister. Colbert then broke the conversation at the point where it happened to be, and said to Aramis, "Monsieur the Ambassador, shall we talk about business?" D'Artagnan immediately withdrew, from politeness. He directed his steps towards the chimney, within hearing of what the king was going to say to Monsieur, who, evidently uneasy, had gone to him. The face of the king was animated. Upon his brow was stamped a will, the redoubtable expression of which already met with no more

Digitized by Google

contradiction in France, and soon would meet with no more in Europe.

"Monsieur," said the king to his brother, "I am not pleased with M. le Chevalier de Lorraine. You, who do him the honour to protect him, must advise him to travel for a few months." These words fell with a crush of an avalanche upon Monsieur, who adored this favourite, and concentrated all his affections in him. "In what has the chevalier been able to displease your Majesty?" cried he, darting a furious look at Madame.—"I will tell you that when he is gone," replied the impassive king. "And also when Madame, here, shall have crossed over into England."—"Madame! into England!" murmured Monsieur, seized with stupor.—"In a week, my brother," continued the king, "while we two will go whither I will tell you." And the king turned upon his heel after having smiled in his brother's face, to sweeten a little the bitter draught he had given him.

During this time, Colbert was talking with the Duc d'Alaméda. "Monsieur," said he to Aramis, "this is the moment for us to come to an understanding. I have made your peace with the king, and I owed that clearly to a man of your merit; but as you have often expressed friendship for me, an opportunity presents itself for giving me a proof of it. You are, besides, more a Frenchman than a Spaniard. Shall we have, answer me frankly, the neutrality of Spain, if we undertake anything against the United Provinces?"—"Monsieur," replied Aramis, "the interest of Spain is very clear. To embroil Europe with the United Provinces, against which subsists the ancient rancour arising from their acquisition of liberty, is our policy; but the King of France is allied with the United Provinces. You are not ignorant, besides, that it would be a maritime war, and that France is not in a state to make such a one with advantage."

Colbert, turning round at this moment, saw D'Artagnan, who was seeking an interlocutor, during the "aside" of the king and Monsieur. He called him, at the same time saying in a low voice to Aramis, "We may talk with M. d'Artagnan, I suppose?"—"Oh, certainly," replied the ambassador.

"We were saying, M. d'Alaméda and I," said Colbert, "that war with the United Provinces would be a maritime war."—"That's evident enough," replied the musketeer.—"And what do you think of it, M. d'Artagnan?"—"I think that to carry on that maritime war you must have a very large land army."

"What did you say?" said Colbert, thinking he had misunderstood him.—"Why a land army?" said Aramis.—

"Because the king will be beaten by sea if he has not the English with him; and when beaten by sea, he will be soon invaded, either by the Dutch in his ports, or by the Spaniards by land."—"And Spain neutral?" asked Aramis.—"Neutral as long as the king shall be the stronger," rejoined D'Artagnan.

Colbert admired that sagacity which never touched a question without illumining it thoroughly. Aramis smiled; he had long known that in diplomacy D'Artagnan acknowledged no master. Colbert, who like all proud men dwelt upon his fantasy with a certainty of success, resumed the subject, "Who told you, M. d'Artagnan, that the king had no navy?"—"Oh! I have taken no heed of these details," replied the captain. "I am but a middling sailor. Like all nervous people I hate the sea; and yet I have an idea that with ships, France being a seaport with two hundred heads, we should have sailors."

Colbert drew from his pocket a little oblong book divided into two columns. On the first were the names of vessels, on the other the figures recapitulating the number of cannon and men requisite to equip these ships. "I have had the same idea as you," said he to D'Artagnan; "and I have had an account drawn up of the vessels we have altogether,—thirty-five vessels."—"Thirty-five vessels! that is impossible!" cried D'Artagnan.—"Something like two thousand pieces of cannon," said Colbert. "That is what the king possesses at this moment. With thirty-five vessels we can make three squadrons, but I must have five."

"Five!" cried Aramis.—"They will be afloat before the end of the year, gentlemen; the king will have fifty ships of the line. With those we may venture on a contest, may we not?"—"To build vessels," said D'Artagnan, "is difficult, but possible. As to arming them, how is that to be done? In France there are neither foundries nor military docks."

"Bah!" replied Colbert, with a gay tone, "I have instituted all that this year and a half past, did you not know it? Don't you know M. d'Infreville?"—"D'Infreville?" replied D'Artagnan; "no."—"He is a man I have discovered; he has a speciality,—he knows how to set men to work. It is he who at Toulon has had the cannon made, and has cut the woods of Bourgogne. And then, Monsieur the Ambassador, you may not believe what I am going to tell you, but I have a further idea."—"Oh, Monsieur!" said Aramis, civilly, "I always believe you."

"Figure to yourself that, calculating upon the character of

the Dutch, our allies, I said to myself, 'They are merchants, they are friends with the king; they will be happy to sell to the king what they fabricate for themselves. Then the more we buy—' Ah! I must add this: I have Forant,—do you know Forant, D'Artagnan?" Colbert, in his warmth, forgot himself; he called the captain simply "D'Artagnan," as the king did. But the captain only smiled at it. "No," replied he, "I don't know him."—"That is another man I have discovered with a genius for buying. This Forant has purchased for me three hundred and fifty thousand pounds of iron in balls, two hundred thousand pounds of powder, twelve cargoes of Northern timber, matches, grenades, pitch, tar,—I know not what!—with a saving of seven per cent. upon what all those articles would cost me made in France."

"That is a good idea," replied D'Artagnan,—"to have Dutch balls cast which will return to the Dutch."—"Is it not,—with loss too?" And Colbert laughed aloud. He was delighted with his own joke. "Still further," added he, "these same Dutch are building for the king at this moment six vessels after the model of the best of their marine. Destouches—ah! perhaps you don't know Destouches?"—"No, Monsieur."—"He is a man who has a glance singularly sure to discern, when a ship is launched, what are the defects and qualities of that ship,—that is valuable, please to observe! Nature is truly whimsical. Well, this Destouches appeared to me to be a man likely to be useful in port, and he is superintending the construction of six vessels of seventy-eight guns, which the Provinces are building for his Majesty. It results from all this, my dear M. d'Artagnan, that the king, if he wished to quarrel with the Provinces, would have a very pretty fleet. Now, you know better than anybody else if the land army is good."

D'Artagnan and Aramis looked at each other, wondering at the mysterious labours this man had effected in a few years. Colbert understood them, and was touched by this best of flatteries. "If we in France were ignorant of what was going on," said D'Artagnan, "out of France still less must be known."

"That is why I told Monsieur the Ambassador," said Colbert, "that Spain, promising its neutrality, England helping us—"—"If England assists you," said Aramis, "I engage for the neutrality of Spain."—"I take you at your word," hastened Colbert to reply with his blunt *bonhomie*. "And, *à propos* of Spain, you have not the 'Golden Fleece,' M. d'Alaméda. I heard the king say the other day that he should like to see you

wear the *grand cordon* of Saint Michael." Aramis bowed. "Oh!" thought D'Artagnan, "and Porthos is no longer here! What ells of ribbon would there be for him in these largesses! Good Porthos!"

"M. d'Artagnan," resumed Colbert, "between us two, you will have, I would wager, an inclination to lead your musketeers into Holland. Can you swim?" and he laughed like a man in a very good humour.—"Like an eel," replied D'Artagnan.—"Ah! but there are some rough passages of canals and marshes yonder, M. d'Artagnan, and the best swimmers are sometimes drowned there."—"It is my profession to die for his Majesty," said the musketeer. "Only as it is seldom that in war much water is met with without a little fire, I declare to you beforehand that I will do my best to choose fire. I am getting old; water freezes me, fire warms, M. Colbert."

And D'Artagnan looked so handsome in juvenile vigour and pride as he pronounced these words that Colbert, in his turn, could not help admiring him. D'Artagnan perceived the effect he had produced. He remembered that the best tradesman is he who fixes a high price upon his goods when they are valuable. He prepared, then, his price in advance. "So then," said Colbert, "we go into Holland?"—"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "only—"—"Only?" said M. Colbert.—"Only," repeated D'Artagnan, "there is in everything the question of interest, and the question of self-love. It is a very fine title,—that of captain of the musketeers; but observe this; we have now the king's guards and the military household of the king. A captain of musketeers ought either to command all that, and then he would absorb a hundred thousand livres a year for expenses of representation and table—"

"Well; but do you suppose, by chance, that the king would haggle with you?" said Colbert.—"Eh, Monsieur, you have not understood me," replied D'Artagnan, sure of having carried the question of interest; "I was telling you that I,—an old captain, formerly chief of the king's guard, having precedence of the marshals of France,—I saw myself one day in the trenches with two equals, the captain of the guards and the colonel commanding the Swiss. Now, at no price will I suffer that. I have old habits; I will stand to them."

Colbert felt this blow, but he was prepared for it. "I have been thinking of what you said just now," said he.—"About what, Monsieur?"—"We were speaking of canals and marshes in which people are drowned."—"Well!"—"Well; if they are

drowned, it is for want of a boat, a plank, or a stick."—"Of a stick [*bâton*], however short it may be," said D'Artagnan.—"Exactly," said Colbert; "and therefore I never heard of an instance of a marshal of France being drowned."

D'Artagnan became pale with joy, and in not a very firm voice, he said, "People would be very proud of me in my country, if I were a marshal of France; but a man must have commanded an expedition as chief to obtain the bâton."—"Monsieur," said Colbert, "here is in this pocket-book, which you will study, a plan of a campaign; you are to carry it into execution next spring with a body of troops which the king puts under your orders."

D'Artagnan took the book tremblingly, and his fingers meeting with those of Colbert, the minister pressed the hand of the musketeer loyally. "Monsieur," said he, "we had both a revenge to take, one over the other. I have begun; it is now your turn!"—"I will do you justice, Monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, "and implore you to tell the king that the first opportunity that shall offer, he may depend upon a victory or seeing me dead."—"Then I will have the *fleurs-de-lis* for your marshal's bâton prepared immediately," said Colbert.

On the morrow of this day, Aramis, who was setting out for Madrid to negotiate the neutrality of Spain, came to embrace D'Artagnan at his hotel. "Let us love each other for four," said D'Artagnan; "we are now but two."—"And you will perhaps never see me again, dear D'Artagnan," said Aramis; "if you knew how I have loved you! I am old, I am extinguished, I am dead."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "you will live longer than I shall. Diplomacy commands you to live; but, for my part, honour condemns me to die."—"Bah! such men as we are, Monsieur the Marshal," said Aramis, "only die satiated with joy or glory."—"Ah!" replied D'Artagnan, with a melancholy smile, "I assure you, Monsieur the Duke, I feel very little appetite for either." They once more embraced, and two hours later they were separated.

Digitized by Google

THE DEATH OF D'ARTAGNAN

CONTRARY to what generally happens, whether in politics or morals, each kept his promise and did honour to his engagements.

The king recalled M. de Guiche and banished M. le Chevalier de Lorraine, so that Monsieur became ill in consequence. Madame set out for London, where she applied herself so earnestly to make her brother, Charles II., have a taste for the political counsels of Mademoiselle de Kéroualle, that the alliance between England and France was signed, and the English vessels, ballasted by a few millions of French gold, made a terrible campaign against the fleets of the United Provinces. Charles II. had promised Mademoiselle de Kéroualle a little gratitude for her good counsels; he made her Duchess of Portsmouth. Colbert had promised the king vessels, munitions, and victories. He kept his word, as is well known. In fine, Aramis, upon whose promises there was least dependence to be placed, wrote Colbert the following letter on the subject of the negotiations which he had undertaken at Madrid:—

"M. COLBERT,—I have the honour to send to you the R. P. d'Oliva, General *ad interim* of the Society of Jesus, my provisional successor. The reverend father will explain to you, M. Colbert, that I reserve to myself the direction of all the affairs of the Order which concern France and Spain; but that I am not willing to retain the title of general, which would throw too much light upon the course of the negotiations with which his Catholic Majesty wishes to entrust me. I shall resume that title by the command of his Majesty when the labours I have undertaken in concert with you, for the great glory of God and his Church, shall be brought to a good end. The R. P. d'Oliva will inform you likewise, Monsieur, of the consent which his Catholic Majesty gives to the signature of a treaty which assures the neutrality of Spain in the event of a war between France and the United Provinces. This consent will be valid, even if England, instead of being active, should satisfy herself with remaining neutral. As to Portugal, of which you and I have spoken, Monsieur, I can assure you it will contribute with all its resources to assist the most Christian king in

his war. I beg you, M. Colbert, to preserve to me your friendship, as also to believe in my profound attachment, and to lay my respect at the feet of his most Christian Majesty.

"Le Duc d'Alaméda."

Aramis had then performed more than he had promised; it remained to be known how the king, M. Colbert, and D'Artagnan would be faithful to one another. In the spring, as Colbert had predicted, the land army entered on its campaign. It preceded, in magnificent order, the court of Louis XIV., who, setting out on horseback, surrounded by carriages filled with ladies and courtiers, conducted the *élite* of his kingdom to this sanguinary *fête*. The officers of the army, it is true, had no other music than the artillery of the Dutch forts; but it was enough for a great number, who found in this war honours, advancement, fortune, or death.

M. d'Artagnan set out commanding a body of twelve thousand men, cavalry and infantry, with which he was ordered to take the different places which form the knots of that strategic network which is called La Frise. Never was an army conducted more gallantly to an expedition. The officers knew that their leader, prudent and skilful as he was brave, would not sacrifice a single man, nor yield an inch of ground, without necessity. He had the old habits of war,—to live upon the country, keep his soldiers singing and the enemy weeping. The captain of the king's musketeers put his effort into showing that he knew his business. Never were opportunities better chosen, *coups de main* better supported, or better advantage taken of errors on the part of the besieged. The army commanded by D'Artagnan took twelve small places within a month. He was engaged in besieging the thirteenth, which had held out five days. D'Artagnan caused the trenches to be opened without appearing to suppose that these people would ever allow themselves to be taken. In the army of this man the pioneers and labourers were a body full of emulation, ideas, and zeal, because he treated them like soldiers, knew how to render their work glorious, and never allowed them to be killed if he could prevent it. It should have been seen then with what eagerness the marshy glebes of Holland were turned over. Those turf heaps, those mounds of potter's clay, melted at the words of the soldiers like butter in the vast frying-pans of the Friesland housewives.

M. d'Artagnan despatched a courier to the king to give him

Digitized by Google

an account of the last successes, which redoubled the good-humour of his Majesty and his inclination to amuse the ladies. These victories of M. d'Artagnan gave so much majesty to the prince that Madame de Montespan no longer called him anything but Louis the Invincible. So that Mademoiselle de la Vallière, who only called the king Louis the Victorious, lost much of his Majesty's favour. Besides, her eyes were frequently red, and for an Invincible nothing is more disagreeable than a mistress who weeps while everything is smiling around her. The star of Mademoiselle de la Vallière was being drowned in the horizon in clouds and tears. But the gaiety of Madame de Montespan redoubled with the successes of the king, and consoled him for every other unpleasant circumstance. It was to D'Artagnan the king owed this; and his Majesty was anxious to acknowledge these services. He wrote to M. Colbert:—

"M. Colbert,—We have a promise to fulfil with M. d'Artagnan, who so well keeps his. This is to inform you that the time is come for performing it. All provisions for this purpose you shall be furnished with in due time. Louis."

In consequence of this, Colbert, who detained the envoy of D'Artagnan, placed in the hands of that messenger a letter from himself for D'Artagnan and a small coffer of ebony inlaid with gold, which, without doubt, was very heavy, as a guard of five men was given to the messenger to assist him in carrying it. These persons arrived before the place which D'Artagnan was besieging, towards daybreak, and presented themselves at the lodgings of the general. They were told that M. d'Artagnan, annoyed by a sortie which the governor, an artful man, had made the evening before, and in which the works had been destroyed, seventy-seven men killed, and the reparation of the breaches begun, had just gone with ten companies of grenadiers to reconstruct the works.

M. Colbert's envoy had orders to go and seek M. d'Artagnan wherever he might be, or at whatever hour of the day or night. He directed his course, therefore, towards the trenches, followed by his escort, all on horseback. They perceived M. d'Artagnan in the open plain, with his gold-laced hat, his long cane, and his large gilded cuffs. He was biting his white moustache, and shaking off with his left hand the dust which the passing balls threw up from the ground they ploughed near him. They also saw, amid this terrible fire which filled the air with its hissing

Digitized by Google

whistle, officers handling the shovel, soldiers rolling barrows, and vast *fascines*, carried or dragged by from ten to twenty men, covering the front of the trench, reopened to the centre by this extraordinary effort of the general animating his soldiers. In three hours all had been reinstated. D'Artagnan began to speak more mildly; and he became quite calm when the captain of the pioneers approached him, hat in hand, to tell him that the trench was again in condition for occupancy. This man had scarcely finished speaking when a ball took off one of his legs, and he fell into the arms of D'Artagnan. The latter lifted up his soldier, and quietly, with soothing words, carried him into the trench amid the enthusiastic applause of the regiments. From that time it was no longer ardour; it was delirium. Two companies stole away up to the advanced posts, which they destroyed instantly.

When their comrades, restrained with great difficulty by D'Artagnan, saw them lodged upon the bastions, they rushed forward likewise, and soon a furious assault was made upon the counterscarp, upon which depended the safety of the place. D'Artagnan perceived there was only one means left of stopping his army, and that was to lodge it in the place. He directed all his force to two breaches, which the besieged were busy in repairing. The shock was terrible; eighteen companies took part in it, and D'Artagnan went with the rest within half-cannon-shot of the place, to support the attack by *échelons*. The cries of the Dutch, who were being poniarded upon their guns by D'Artagnan's grenadiers, were distinctly audible. The struggle grew fiercer with the despair of the governor, who disputed his position foot by foot. D'Artagnan, to put an end to the affair and silence the fire, which was unceasing, sent a fresh column, which penetrated like a wimble through the gates that remained solid; and he soon perceived upon the ramparts, through the fire, the terrified flight of the besieged pursued by the besiegers.

It was at this moment that the general, breathing freely and full of joy, heard a voice behind him saying, "Monsieur, if you please,—from M. Colbert." He broke the seal of a letter, which contained these words:—

"M. D'ARTAGNAN,—The king commands me to inform you that he has nominated you Marshal of France, as a reward for your good services and the honour you do to his arms. The king is highly pleased, Monsieur, with the captures you have

made; he commands you in particular to finish the siege you have begun, with good fortune to you and success for him."

D'Artagnan was standing with a heated countenance and a sparkling eye. He looked up to watch the progress of his troops upon the walls, still enveloped in red and black volumes of smoke. "I have finished," replied he to the messenger; "the city will have surrendered in a quarter of an hour." He then resumed his reading:

"The coffer, M. d'Artagnan, is my own present. You will not be sorry to see that while you warriors are drawing the sword to defend the king, I am animating the pacific arts to adorn you with rewards that are worthy of you. I commend myself to your friendship, Monsieur the Marshal, and beg you to believe in all mine.

"COLBERT."

D'Artagnan, intoxicated with joy, made a sign to the messenger, who approached with his coffer in his hands. But at the moment the marshal was going to look at it, a loud explosion resounded from the ramparts and called his attention towards the city. "It is strange," said D'Artagnan, "that I don't yet see the king's flag upon the walls, or hear the drums beat for a parley." He launched three hundred fresh men under a high-spirited officer, and ordered another breach to be beaten. Then, being more tranquil, he turned towards the coffer which Colbert's envoy held out to him. It was his treasure,—he had won it.

D'Artagnan was holding out his hand to open the coffer, when a ball from the city crushed it in the arms of the officer, struck D'Artagnan full in the chest, and knocked him down upon a sloping heap of earth, while the *fleurdelisé* bâton, escaping from the broken sides of the box, came rolling under the powerless hand of the marshal. D'Artagnan endeavoured to raise himself. It was thought he had been knocked down without being wounded. A terrible cry broke from the group of his frightened officers. The marshal was covered with blood; the paleness of death ascended slowly to his noble countenance. Leaning upon the arms which were held out on all sides to receive him, he was able once more to turn his eyes towards the place, and to distinguish the white flag at the crest of the principal bastion; his ears, already deaf to the sounds of life, caught feebly the rolling of the drum which announced the victory. Then, clasp-

ing in his nerveless hand the bâton, ornamented with its *fleurs de-lis*, he cast down upon it his eyes, which had no longer the power of looking upwards towards heaven, and fell back murmuring these strange words, which appeared to the surprised soldiers cabalistic words,—words which had formerly represented so many things upon earth, and which none but the dying man longer comprehended,—" Athos, Porthos, *au revoir* Aramis, adieu for ever! "

Of the four valiant men whose history we have related, there now remained but one single body; God had taken back the souls.

GENERAL BOOKBINDING CO.
CONTROL MARK
Google

Digitized by Google

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

DATE DUE

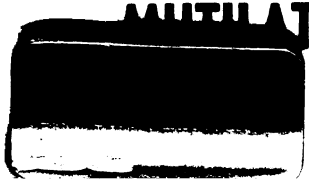
SEP 4 1990
SEP 05 1990
NOV 26 2001
OCT 20 2001
AUG 16 1993
AUG 02 1993
JUL 30 2002
JUL 14 2002

Digitized by Google

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
3 9015 00052 8227

Ret to stacks - pres.
8/96

DO NOT REMOVE
OR
MUTILATE CARD



Digitized by Google